

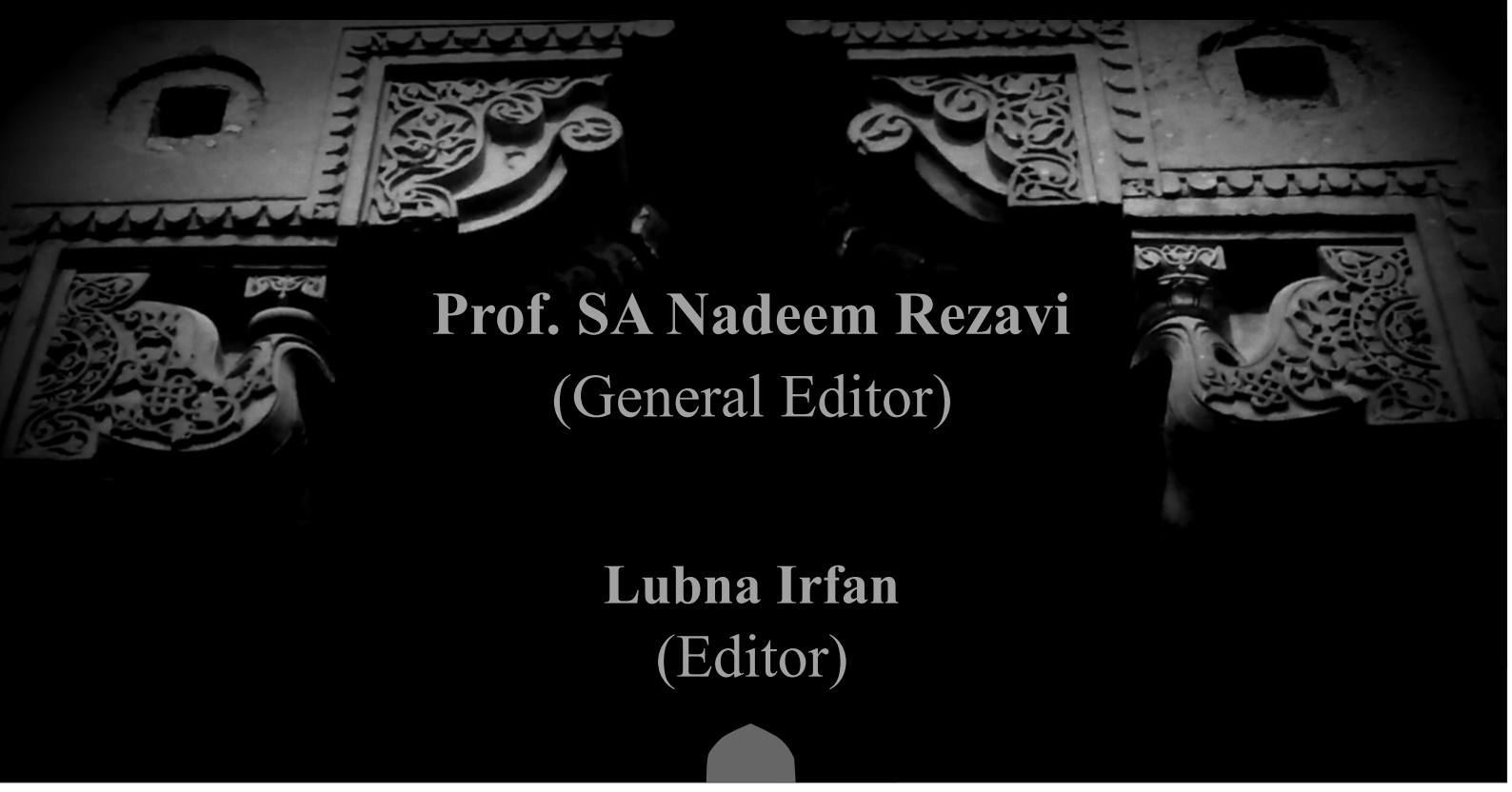


# **Bulletin of Sultania Historical Society (BOSHS)**

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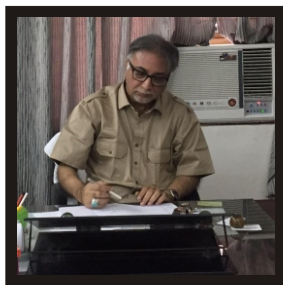
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## General Editor's Comment

The Sultania Historical Study has been functioning as a part of the Department of History since the very early years of its existence. Named originally as a Historical Society, it was renamed after Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum subsequent to MAO College being upgraded as a University in 1920. Begum Sultan Jahan, after whom the Sultania Historical Society was renamed, was the Begum of Bhopal who contributed immensely towards the establishment of the MAO College and was ultimately the founding Chancellor of the Aligarh Muslim University between 17 December 1920 to 12 May 1930.

The revival of the earlier Historical Society as Sultania Historical Society was done by the efforts of Prof. A.B.A. Haleem, the then Chairman of Department of History and Politics, Prof. Mohammad Habib and Mr. S. Naushey Ali. At a time when the society was revived in 1923, it emerged as one of the most active societies in the University. Some inkling of its aims and objectives, as well as functioning can be got from a notice to this society recorded in the pages of the *Aligarh Magazine* dated 1934-35.

From the date of its re-emergence in 1923 the society had well laid out dual objectives, viz., (a) to encourage and popularise the study of History; and (b) to foster research work in History. In order to fulfil these aims, it functioned at three levels. One, it organised excursions of students to various historical sites under the guidance of the faculty members. Thus for example Professors Mohammad Habib and S. Moinul Haq accompanied a tour to Afghanistan which also visited Ghazni in 1932. The same year, another set of teachers accompanied another group of students to historical places in Southern India. We are informed that in order to acquaint the students with historical sites, tours were organized to places like Taxila, Peshawar, Bijapur, Chittor, Ajmer, Sanchi as well as Delhi and Agra. This helped the students to obtain “firsthand knowledge of the actual working of the administrative machinery of, and the general conditions prevailing in the country”.

At the second level, the society organized and arranged lectures and seminars of eminent historians. Thus Fr. Heras, Rushbrooke Williams, Stella Kramrisch, Srinivas Iyengar and Sulaiman Nadvi, amongst others, delivered stimulating and thought provoking lectures, igniting lively discussions and debates.

The third level at which the Sultania Historical Society functioned was the work of bringing out publications. The Publications Programme of the Department in fact was an important work of the society. Important early publications of the Department of History, like *Khazainul Futuh* of Hazrat Amir Khusrau, edited by S. Moinul Haq, and *Sultan Mohmud of Ghazna* of Mohammad Habib, are some of the important publications of this Sultania Historical Society.

How and in which circumstances the Sultania Historical Society transformed into a defunct society responsible for organizing only a 'Farewell Party' of the M.A. Students is not properly recorded or known. However at least since the 1970's the Society has only functioned as such. A gold medal, the 'Sultanjahan Gold Medal' is also given to the student securing the highest marks at the post-graduate level. The tradition of “appointing” a Secretary of the Sultania Historical Society has however survived the ravages of time. A student securing the highest aggregate marks is usually declared 'Secretary' a few days before the 'Function' and his/her only duty is to occupy a chair besides the Chairman and the Guest of Honour at the time of the Group Photo-session.

In the past few decades, two “awards” have been added to the Farewell Party which is given the name of the Sultania Historical Society Function: the *Razmi Memorial Award* (given to a person securing highest marks in the first year with Medieval India) and the *Sohail Ahmad Award* (to the recipient of highest marks in first year in Ancient India).

Razmi Rizwan Husain was a promising scholar who passed his M.A. (Medieval India) in 1980. He met with a tragic road accident in Delhi in December 1981. At the time of his passing away, he had completed his

M.Phil. from JNU under the supervision of Professor Bipan Chandra, and had been appointed as a faculty at Jamia Millia Islamia. The Board of Studies, Department of History, AMU unanimously passed a resolution instituting the Razmi Memorial Award which is a token of appreciation for the aspiring and budding scholars of Medieval India. [Incidentally in Razmi's memory there is a fellowship each in JMI and JNU. An Annual Memorial lecture is also organised at IIC, New Delhi since the last six years].

Sohail Ahmad, like Razmi Rizwan, was also a student of our Department. He did his M.A. in Ancient India History. He expired in 1992 and his classmates instituted an Award in his name which is given at the Annual Sultania Historical Society function. Both the awards are in the form of a book.

We have now resolved to somehow revive this great Sultania Historical Society. This *Bulletin* is a small beginning in this direction. All the papers being published here were presented in the weekly proceedings of this Society. Today, as per the traditions of the past few decades, the participants are not the great scholars like Sir Jadunath Sarkar or Rushbrooke Williams, but ordinary students and Research Scholars of the Department.

Our endeavour would be to once again serve the subject of History and help in its dissemination at various levels. As member of the Society, and as the Chairman and Co-ordinator of the Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History, I will try my utmost to (a) Organise lectures of important historians, (b) hold regular seminars; and (c) revive the tradition of publications. We have decided that this *Bulletin* would be a quarterly, with four issues each year. Due to the paucity of funds, we at the moment would be publishing it only as an *e-journal*. If and when funds became available, we will also come out with a print-version of this journal.

I am beholden to a large number of people for making this attempt possible. My first thanks are due to Professor Emeritus of the Department, Professor Irfan Habib for not only agreeing to be interviewed, but for all the help he gave us in holding our talks and seminars. Professor Shireen Moosvi, another former Chairman and Coordinator of CAS in History, has been a constant source of inspiration. Both she and Prof. Habib have promised us to give preparatory lectures and organize a Workshop for those aspiring to clear UGC NET & JRF test this year.

I am also thankful to Dr. S. Jabir Raza and Dr. Muhammad Sajjad, both Professors at CAS, for regularly organizing the Student's and Research Scholars seminars in the previous academic session. Without those seminars, this *Bulletin* would not have been possible. Professors Mohd. Parwez, Manvendra Kumar Pundhir, as well as Dr. Shadab Bano, Dr. S. Ali Kazim, Dr. Fazila Shahnawaz, Dr. Enayatullah Khan, Dr. Mohd. Nafeesh, Dr. Lucky Khan and Dr. Mohd. Zafar Minhaj all took out time to not only help students prepare their talks, but encourage them with their presence.

I also thank Professor Farhat Hasan (DU), Professor Najaf Haider (JNU), Professor Ishrat Alam (AMU) and Professor R.P. Bahuguna (JMI) for agreeing to be in our panel of Advisory Committee.

Last but not the least I thank my students, both M.A. students (previous & final years) as well as Research Scholars, without whom none of this would have been possible. My Research Scholar Lubna Irfan, who also happens to be the Editor of this issue of the *Bulletin* laboured the utmost. It was her intellectual and physical labour which made its issuance possible. In fact, this is her journal. She was the typist, the editor, the proof-reader, designer and composer all role into one. Thank you. Lubna.

In the end, I look towards my students to take forward this great tradition. It is only you who can actually help in the revival of this great society and its traditions. The Department, of course, would be there to help you in your endeavours!

Best of luck and looking forward to a bright future.

**(Professor Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi)**

Chairman & Coordinator

CAS, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh





## Editor's Comment

The Bulletin of Sultania Historical Society (BOSHS) has come into existence as a result of an attempt at filling the lacunae of absence of a channel for students of Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, to publish their research work. The formulation of a Journal that gives space to amateur researchers and provides them scope of interaction with the learned pioneers of their field was long overdue. It was with this aim that the idea of a Bulletin published under the aegis of Sultania Historical Society of the Department of History was conceived. The current issue, being the first issue, contains the papers that were read at the weekly seminars that were held at The Centre of Advanced Study Department of History from the month of April, 2017. The purpose of these seminars was to inculcate a habit of debate and discussion amongst the students and scholars. In the process it also helped in building a better environment of study and research as it kept the students updated on the topics and themes of the research work being carried on by different scholars at the Department. This exercise has proved to be a great success from the first seminar itself.

Without going into the details of the papers that were read at the Seminar, I would briefly like to point out some important discussions that were held during some of these seminars. In the introductory talk on the topic, "The Myth of Black Cannibal Outsider: Contextualizing the Presence of Africans in the Indian Subcontinent from Medieval Times", questions were put up from all fronts, they ranged from the history of the name '*Habshi*' (Abyssinian) to the nature of social mobility as was present in the medieval and pre-modern administrative structures. Various aspects of racial and cultural segregation and exploitation of the *Habshi's* were dealt with and the presentation was also placed in the present context of the attacks on the African community living in India. Similar enthusiasm was seen in question answer session of all other seminars, the paper on the topic, "From Fluidity to Rigidity: Development of Modern Social Structure" also invited a serious discussion on the changing nature of caste system. The interest in the seminars grew with time and by the time we had the session on the topic, "A Brief Overview of the Historical Works of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan," the discussion took the major portion of the time of the seminar, there were questions enquiring about the loyalist stand of Sir Syed towards the British as well as inputs suggesting the gravity of his role as a Muslim social reformer in a time when the Muslim community was trapped in ignorance and backwardness.

Thus it can be positively said that the publication of the first Volume of the Bulletin of Sultania Historical Society (BOSHS) is a natural progression from the vibrant seminars and the academic activity that they inculcated. We look forward to more such discussions and publications.

**-Lubna Irfan**

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## **African Diaspora in Medieval Indian History:** **Contextualizing the Political Presence of *Sidi* and *Habshi* Tribes in India**

-Lubna Irfan (lubna.history@gmail.com, GD-8949)  
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Rulers of Gujerat. c.1618

While the large scale transfer of African population to Americas has been well documented and studied, less is known about the movement of the African slaves towards the east. Major areas of supply of slaves to the east during the 13th and 14th centuries were areas around Nile, including Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan.<sup>1</sup> Transfer of African slaves to the east made them an important force that contributed in the military campaigns of the kingdoms of the east. Apart from the presence in the military circles, Abyssinians also served as helps, bodyguards or soldiers and sometimes as agricultural workers in the areas of Indian subcontinent. The presence of these sections who were called *sidis* or *habshis* in the medieval society of Indian subcontinent, was however not limited to the labour work. At various instances across the time period of medieval era *habshis* and *sidis* are reported to have exercised much political and administrative authority,

though these instances were sporadic and hardly any of these powerful Indo-Africans could establish a dynastic rule, yet the fact that the nature of power could also reach the numerically disadvantaged and marginal sections like *habshis* is an area of interest for the researchers.

This paper would aim at tracing the political presence of the African settled in India from the medieval times, concentrating on the Mughal period and chalk out the trajectory of their rise to power and their fall. Further the paper would chalk the social and political realities of the *Sidis* of present times and their relegation to the status of Scheduled Tribes in certain states. It would touch on the causes behind this change in the position of the *Habshis* as they travelled in time from Medieval to Modern era.

The information obtained from contemporary and secondary sources suggest that the spread of the *habshi* population was vast even in medieval times. They were reported to be present in the northern areas,

<sup>1</sup>Don Jaide, "SIDIS (SEYDIS):THE AFRICAN KINGS OF INDIA", Rasta Livewire, [August 21, 2008](http://www.africaresource.com/rasta/sesostis-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/sidis-seydisthe-african-kings-of-india/), accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.africaresource.com/rasta/sesostis-the-great-the-egyptian-hercules/sidis-seydisthe-african-kings-of-india/>

Ibn Batuta, a Moroccan traveller, informs about the brave Abyssinian Badr who was the governor of Alapur near Delhi during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Areas in Indian subcontinent where there was a concentrated *Habshi* presence included the areas of Gujarat in the west and Bengal in the east, both carried on slave trade with the east African coast and hence were home to a considerable population of Africans.<sup>3</sup> In the west, important centre was Cambay, where reports suggest that the *habshi* population not only was an important armed section in the army of the Khilji Sultans that ruled that area during the 15<sup>th</sup> century but they also involved themselves in trade of agate. Thus there appears the presence of a number of free Africans in these areas. Further the presence of *habshis* as a powerful merchant class and armed soldiery must have made them an active force in shaping of the political scenario of that area. Another area where *Sidis* are reported to have enjoyed a major political presence and power was in Bengal in the east. Bengali rulers of 15<sup>th</sup> century had a number of Africans who were placed at strategic and powerful administrative and political positions and these African elements eventually went ahead to overthrow the Bengali rulers and establishing a *Habshi* dynasty, which however couldn't last long.

Apart from Bengal and Gujarat the *habshi* community exercised much authority in another area of Indian Subcontinent that is Deccan. The area of Deccan was divided into three principal kingdoms of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda during Medieval times. These kingdoms contained a significant number of Abyssinian people and there were quite a few who had risen to the status of power and authority of the nature of the royalty. Despite the political and administrative power enjoyed by the *Habshis*, their social realities remained of a disadvantaged nature. The *Sidis* in the Indian subcontinent had to face a racial and social discrimination, even if they were patronized by the royalty and exercised much authority. There is reference to much antagonism faced by Jamaluddin Yaqut, the alleged lover and close confidante of Razia Sultan, the first female ruler of Delhi Sultanat; the antagonism was largely centred on racial descent of Yaqut who was a *Habshi*.<sup>4</sup>

This paper, thus, enquires into the historical realities of *Sidis* and *Habshis* in the Indian subcontinent in the medieval times, and with that information the paper would also try to locate the social position of this tribal group in India. The reading of historical sources not only brings forth the finer details of the social exclusion faced by this section, but it also helps in the development of the larger picture which in turn helps in establishing a trajectory of the social mobility of various groups. This paper would precisely aim at putting into context the social status and political power enjoyed by the Indo-Africans through the medieval era.

Tracing from the medieval times, from the beginning of the arrival of *Habshis* to Indian Subcontinent to the present times the paper will also analyse the relative extent of power as exercised by this tribal group in the past and the change in the form of its accessibility and scope in the present scenario. Enquiry will be made into the anthropological relations and assimilation of the *Habshi* and Sidi tribes in the Indian population over time. Reports of surviving descendants of *Sidis* of the historical times suggest the presence of 250,000 *Sidis* and *Habshis* still residing in India. They are dispersed in states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. There is also a considerable population of these groups in present day Pakistan where reportedly in Sindh some 50,000 *Sidis* still have homes. With the analysis of information in contemporary medieval sources and taking into account the works of modern authorities on *Sidis* an attempt is being made in this paper to draw a contrast between the accessibility and the scope of power to these tribal sections in medieval times as compared to their Scheduled Tribes status and inaccessibility to real power in current times.

It is also proposed that the unique nature of gradual relegation of the Sidi community from them being ones exercising considerable power to the level of them being marginalized as Scheduled Tribes can be understood from the nature of the influx of the Sidi population during various periods of time and the nature of social mobility existing in a particular society. *Kamat* research findings suggest that the Sidi migration that took place during the early phase, i.e. to say before the advent of European hegemony, comprised of large commercial sections who were migrating in lieu of profits in addition to the transfer of slaves. With the advent of Europeans the transfer of African slaves increases exponentially, and the gradual emergence of rigidity in the structure of the political organization must have contributed in the marginalization of the Sidi

<sup>2</sup>H.A.R. Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Battuta* (New Delhi : Goodword, 2012), 224.

<sup>3</sup>Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, Jean-Pierre Angenot eds., *Uncovering the History of Africans in Asia* (Lieden, Boston : Brill, 2008), 153.

<sup>4</sup>V. D. Mahajan, *History of Medieval India* (New Delhi : S. Chand, 2001), 102.



population.

It is informed that Sir John Hawkins was one of the first Englishman who had a role in the traffic of African slaves of great numbers. Furthermore it is reported that in 1791 the number of European factories on the coasts of Africa was 40; out of these 14 were English, 3 French, 15 Dutch, 4 Portuguese and 4 Danish. Out of these factories more than 74,000 Sidi slaves were transported to the colonies of the European countries. Around 10,000 slaves were transferred by Portuguese alone and 38,000 by the British. The slave factories increased their amount of transporting *Sidis* until a ban was placed on the slave trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Thus the intensity of African slave trading activities had become aggravated with the arrival of the colonial masters.

To analyse the position of power enjoyed by the *Sidis* in the medieval era there is a need to look into the sources of that period and since there are no accounts exclusively on *Habshi* communities, the information contained in official histories or memoirs need to be utilised to understand the position of *Habshi* community vis-à-vis the established powerful races and communities. When there is a discussion on tribal histories, it needs to be understood that the division is being made in the name of race as a community structure, thus racial ethnicity becomes the vantage point of comparative study between various groups. This can hold importance in present times but to understand the nature of the organization of populations and their associations as community structures in bygone times one needs to analyse the social conditions and psychological trends of the past. For example in a monarchical form of government which was dominated by a strong central authority everything was relevant in context of loyalty to the Emperor, be it religion, race or caste. This trend died out with the decay of the autocratic power and rise of commercial colonial powers. And with the coming of the British in India the trend of rigid classification of people in various community structures was started. And it was a part of these attempts at crystallization of community structures that along with other community structures the structures of Scheduled Tribes were put into place.<sup>6</sup>



*Shah Jahan Honours the Religious Orthodoxy: Two Habshi saints visible*

<sup>5</sup> Herold Christopher, "Social formation of the Siddhis in the Dharwad and Karwar districts of Karnataka State" (Ph.D., Mahatma Gandhi University, 2010), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Virginius Xaxa, "Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 24 (Jun. 12-18, 1999), pp. 1519-1524, 1519.



A brief overview of the *Habshi* past would suffice here to build up a contrast between the past and the present. In addition to the Abyssinian governor of Alapur near modern day Delhi, mentioned above there have been an active presence of *Habshis* in the Indian subcontinent in early periods of medieval era. The Abyssinian governor about which Ibn Batuta informs us was also reported to have been a brave heart and a ferocious eater. Ibn Batuta writes of his food habits, he mentions that after eating his meals which included a whole sheep he would drink a pound and a half of ghee in accordance with the custom of his country of Abyssinia.<sup>7</sup> Moreover the mention of Abyssinians surfaces majorly in Ibn Batuta's work for their military services which were provided by them to various elites of the Indian Dynasties. The author of *Rehla*, Ibn Battuta mentions about a boat, al-Jagir, which he boarded and which had a complement of fifty rowers and fifty Abyssinian men-at-arms. These men at arms were supposed to be the guarantors of safety on the India Ocean waters. To highlight the importance of the *Habshi* protectors Ibn Batuta adds that if even one of the *Habshi* soldiers was on a ship it will not be attacked by the 'Indian pirates and idolaters'.<sup>8</sup> Ibn Batuta also relates instances about ship owners and their factors; he suggests that factors on board of a ship were like some great amirs. When the factor would go on shore he would be preceded by archers and Abyssinians with javelins, swords, drums, trumpets and bugles. On reaching his accommodation these Abyssinians would stand their lances on both sides of the door and continue like this during the stay of the factor.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore while mentioning the details of the coastal town of Dinawar and the town of Kalanbu (Colombo) which according to Ibn Batuta was one of the finest and largest town in Ceylon, he mentions *Habshis*. The author relates that in the town of Kalanbu resides the wazir and ruler of the sea Jalasti and this man has with him about five hundred Abyssinians.<sup>10</sup> Thus it can be understood that the significance of *Habshis* as a community of being armed defenders and guards for rulers and elites of various places and types was enormous and that they also had a reputation of being the ferocious defenders.

There was a lesser known presence of *Habshis* in the northern areas of the Indian subcontinent as well in medieval times, where there a number of *Habshis* nobles reported during the reign of Shah Jahan and most of them enjoyed a position of considerable political and administrative power and authority. We however start noticing the presence of *Habshis* from the period of Akbar himself; there is reference to Abyssinians and Afghans fighting in a battle during the rebellion of the Mirzas of Gujarat.<sup>11</sup> A source on Mughal nobility mentions a number of *Habshi* nobles who had become a part of the Mughal administrative paraphernalia. Habash Khan *Habshi* Dakani or Sidi Miftah was one noble who tactfully secured for himself a *mansab* of 3000 zat and 1500 do-aspa si-aspa sawaar rank and a jagir along with the title of Habsh Khan, when he was the custodian of the Udgir fort and had to give it over to the besieging army under Khan-Dauran Bahadur Nusrat-Jang.<sup>12</sup> After joining Mughal ranks this Sidi warrior proved loyal and of good service to the Empire and when Aurangzeb as a prince proceeded to Golconda, Sidi Miftah took active part in the affair and did good service.<sup>13</sup> An interesting insight appears with the mention of a particular Sidi Unar who was the *khazanchi* or treasurer at Burhanpur. When Mahabat Khan, one of the leading noble of Shah Jahan had reached Burhanpur he had expressed a desire to present a peshkash to the King in order to compensate for the expenditure on the conquest of the fort of Burhanpur. The fact that an important post of *kazanchi* was commanded by a Sidi, reflects the nature of their access to power.<sup>14</sup> The same source on Mughal nobility mentions a Sidi Raihan Habashi who had attacked the fort of Bir in Maharashtra and a Mughal royal officer had to be sent to control the attack.<sup>15</sup> One *Habshi* who is reported to have been famous as a chief and was

<sup>7</sup> Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 224.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>11</sup> Shaikh Farid Bhakkari, *Zakhirat-ul-Khwanin*, ed. Moinul Haque, Karachi, 3 Volumes, 1970, trans. Ziauddin Desai in two parts as *The Dhakhirat-ul-Khwanin of Shaikh Farid Bhakkari* (Vol. I), Delhi, 1993 and *Nobility Under the Great Mughals* (Vol. II and III), Delhi, 2003, Vol. I, 85.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Vol. III, 235

<sup>13</sup> Nawwâb Şamşam-Ud-Daula Shâh Nawâz Khân, *The Maathir-Ul-Umarâ : Biographies Of The Muhammadan And Hindu Officers Of The Timurid Sovereigns Of India From 1500 To About 1780 A.D.*, 2 Volumes, trans. And compiled H. Beveridge, B.C.S. (Retd.) and Bains Prashad, D.Sc, F.R.A.S.B. (New Delhi : Low Price Publication, 1941), Vol. 1, 596.

<sup>14</sup> Bhakkari, *Zakhirat-ul-Khwanin*, II, 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., III, 225.

considerably powerful during Mughal Era was Yaqut Khan Habashi. This man was chief in Nizaumul Mulk's Dakan territories and he later joined the service of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan along with his brothers; he was honoured with a *mansab* of 20,000 person and 15,000 horse rank, on his induction into Mughal nobility. There however is further reference to Yaqut's disloyalty to the Mughal governors of Deccan, when the governors laid siege on Daulatabad fort. This act eventually led him to prison. Moreover there is mention of the grandson of Yaqut Khan, Hasan Khan, who eventually joined Mughal service and received a fief in Deccan.<sup>16</sup> Another source on Mughal nobility, compilation of the biographies of various nobles of Mughals, Maasirul Umara, also gives a detailed description of a number of *Habshis* in positions of power. Abhang K. an Abyssinian is reported to have been involved in defending the fortress of Ahmadnagar in 1595.<sup>17</sup> The position of the *Habshis* as defenders and protectors of goods appears well maintained during the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century and later, where there is mention of one Habsh Khan who accompanied a consignment of goods being sent from Bengal to the court, with a body of troops.<sup>18</sup> The martial nature of the Sidi community also surfaces in the fact that they held some of the very important fortresses of the Deccan area and they defended these fortresses with tact and strength. It is informed that during Shah Jahan's reign when inroads were being made into the Deccan territory then the fort of Bidar was being defended by one Sidi Marjan who had its charge for the past 30 years when Dara Shukoh attacked it. Sidi Marjan eventually is reported to have lost his life and the fort.<sup>19</sup> Another Sidi who was the governor of a fort which is famous for its strength in Deccan, the Daulatabad fort, was Sidi Salm. The particular fort was famous in the Deccan for its difficulty and for its abundance of munitions, and was on the top of a ridge and had on two sides streams which were not easily crossed.<sup>20</sup> One interesting reference which reflects that the community structure of Abyssinians in the medieval times also held considerable significance is one which informs of the encounter between Mahabat Khan the commander-in-chief of the Mughal forces when they attacked Daulatbad during Shah Jahan's reign and Sidi Yaqut. The author of one of the primary sources on the Mughal nobility writes that in this battle the 'brave imperialists' slew Abyssinians who despite this strong attack stood their ground for a long time. Eventually Yaqut Khan was killed with infliction of twenty-seven wounds with lances and swords. Author goes on to compare the loyal Abyssinians to locusts and ants and informs that they were trying to remove the body of their leader Yaqut from the site. Furthermore Yaqut is referred to as a 'leader who was unequalled in his knowledge of military technique and arranging the forces', thus reflecting the military expertise of the *Sidis* which made them possessors of considerable power.<sup>21</sup> An intriguing instance of the *Habshis* exercising power even on the high born nobles is reported as well in one of the sources. It is informed that ruler of Bijapur sent an Afghan named Fath Khan to take the possession of the territories after the conquest of Nizam Shahi lands by Mughals. A pact between the Mughals and the Bijapuris had promises to hand over to Bijapur by Mughals, the territories pertaining to Bijapuri area. This Fath Khan had made Dandarajpuri, a strong fort, as his residence. The Marathas grew aggressive seeing the weakness of the Bijapuris and this frightened the Afghan Fath Khan, who escaped to the Sidi stronghold of Janjira. There this Afghan was thinking of surrendering the fort of Janjira and saving his life in return. The three slaves of the Afghan who were defenders of the fort of Janjira, namely, Sidi Sambal, Sidi Yaqut and Sidi Khairiyat, got knowledge of this intention of Fath Khan and they seized him and put chains on his legs. These *Sidis* also wrote to the ruler of Bijapur and Khan Jahan Bahadur the governor of Deccan about this incident. The said Bahadur sent a gracious reply, a robe of honour and Rs. 5,000 in cash and arranged for the rank of 400 foot with 200 horses for the first, 300 with 100 horses for the second, and 200 foot with 100 horses for the third. He even is reported to have assigned them a fertile fief near the port of Surat. Furthermore, apart from the Mughal Empire in the north there was the kingdom of Jaunpur which had a number of *Sidis* occupying space of power and authority. Jaunpur is reported to have a governor of the name Malik Sarwar who was a *Habshi*. This Sidi was reported to have started a hereditary succession of this post of governor. He was succeeded in his post by his son Mubarak Shah who used to mint coins in his own name and who was in turn succeeded by his own brother Ibrahim Shah. Ibrahim Shah as the governor of Jaunpur had a reign of 40 years and was a

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., III, 247.

<sup>17</sup> Shâh Nawâz Khân, *The Maathir-Ul-Umarâ*, I, 54.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., I, 266

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., I, 661

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., I, 317.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., II, 993

great connoisseur of art and aesthetics and is remembered in history as patron of literature.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to these references to *Habshis* holding crucial positions of political and administrative nature, they are also reported to have been maintainers of full-fledged dynasties of their own. Mention in this can't be missed of Janjira and Bengal. While in former the Sidi rule lasted generations and in the latter *Habshis* could sustain only a single generation of authority. Sidis of Janjira exercised such great amount of power that they were considered one of the four most powerful Kingdoms who were at war with the Marathas under Shivaji, the other three being, Mughals, Bijapuris and Portuguese.<sup>23</sup> The significant presence of the Sidis at the island of Janjira can be understood from the fact that the Roha creek where the river Kundalika runs into the Arabian Sea was once the northern limit of the land of Abyssinians or *Habshis* which was called Habsan. Thus Janjira along with the fort of Danda Rajpuri was the stronghold of the Sidi power in the Indian subcontinent from 15<sup>th</sup> century till the modern times.<sup>24</sup>

Bengal is another area which could give a lot of effective power to the *Habshis* as a group. Bengal of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was home to a number of *Habshis* due to the active trade that went on between the Bengal coast and the East African coast. It is informed that the Bengali ruler Sultan Rukn al-Din who ruled from 1450-1474 had around 8,000 African slaves who were in position of significant power. The amount of power and strength of the *Habshi* slaves of Bengal seemed to have been increased with time. During the reign of Jalal al Din Fath Shah (1481-1487) the slaves became considerably influential. These Bengali *Habshis* established a dynasty of their own after overthrowing Jalal al Din Fath Shah. It is informed that while the *Habshi* commander-in-chief, Amir al-Umara Malik Andil, who was loyal to the Sultan was on a campaign, the other *Habshis* including the chief eunuch conspired to overthrow the Sultan and they killed him. The *Habshi* commander of the palace guards, Sultan Shahzada, enthroned himself as Barbak Shah but he was soon overthrown by *Habshi* Amir al-Umara. After three years of the rule of this kind ruler, the power fell into the hands of *Habshi* Habash Khan with an infant King on the throne. Sidi Badr, another Abyssinian of considerable power went ahead to kill this Habash Khan and crowned himself as Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah and started acting tyrannically. It was the cruel and oppressive actions undertaken by him that provoked strong opposition against him and against the *Habshi* population in general. His army of 5000 *Habshis* was held captive for 3 months and then his life ended and the *Habshi* dynasty of Bengal came to a bloody end. After this dismissal of *Habshis* they were forced to flee to the areas of Delhi, Jaunpur, Gujarat and Deccan.<sup>25</sup>

The changing nature of the development of society and the dynamic cultural transformation of *Sidis* in India is a phenomenal story of decay and decline.<sup>26</sup> *Sidis* in contemporary times are found in various parts of India; they are inhabitants of states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Of the four Indian states which are home to the *Sidi* population in large numbers, the *Sidi's* are classified as Scheduled Tribes in merely two of them, Karnataka and Gujarat.

The primary aim of this paper becomes relevant when the inaccessibility to political power by the *Sidis* becomes evident, when Helena Basu, a person who has undertaken serious ground work in the *Sidi* areas argues that, “*Sidis* do not complain about (racial) discrimination but about political negligence.”<sup>27</sup> Thus the gradual and continuous degradation of powerful tribe of the *Sidis* as a community which possessed considerable amount of power in medieval times as reflected from the contemporary medieval sources and its eventual relegation to the position of Scheduled Tribes and its helplessness and poverty in present times needs to be understood and acknowledged. The first step towards redressal is to acknowledge the marginal and unprivileged nature of the *Sidi* community in India today, since it is at the structural level that the limitations are being faced by this community because they do make serious efforts to overcome the destitute conditions they are present in.

<sup>22</sup> Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, eds., *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, 193.

<sup>23</sup> R.R.S. Chauhan, *Africans in India: From Slavery to Royalty* (New Delhi : Asian Publication Services, 1995), 68.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, eds., *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*, 194.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Simms Hamilton Ed., *Creating a Paradigm and Research Agenda for Comparative Studies of the Worldwide Dispersion of African Peoples* (East Lansing : Michigan State University, 1990), 28.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



## From Fluidity to Rigidity: Development of Modern Social Structure of Varna

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The time that has elapsed since the very beginning of civilization has been one that is marked by continuous struggle between the classes. The clashing classes can be basically deduced into two; people with means (elite and learned) and people without means (ordinary and ignorant). Now, it is among these two classes the whole system of social hierarchy and division is inherited. With the passage of time proliferation of castes took place as more and more people were being annexed to the four fold Varna order. Nevertheless, many of the tribal peasantry subjugated to caste remained along with others distinction of ruled India at that lines of and transportation and it proved to be developing for structure. Media role in public thoughts and foundation of caste of the modern thence forth conflicts.



Sidhant making his presentation on 22 April, 2017

who were Hindu system of indifferent and maintained their tribalism. British time when modern communication were developing more tragic than Hindu social plays a very critical development of beliefs. The journals were one developments that ensured the caste

### **The True Varna**

The Varna system came in Vedic period itself but was more fluid than modern and post modern times. The *Brahmanas* sometime put *Kshatriyas* (*Panchvamisa Brahmana* and *Shatapatha Brahmana*) at the top of hierarchy and sometime *Vaisyas* (elsewhere in *Shatapatha Brahmana*) at the top of hierarchy. Whatever may be the case, *Rig Veda* makes one thing clear that the Varna was nothing but division of labour in the society. It mentions about a family in which a member says: “I am a poet, my father is a physician, and my mother is a grinder. Earning a livelihood through a different means we live together...”<sup>1</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, in fact, identifies all men as having traits of both *Brahmans* and *Sudras*. It may suggest the Varna being the outcome of one's job. The Varna hierarchy that *Dharmasutras* fixed, just after Vedic period, clearly divided society into four fold order with *Brahmans* at the top of hierarchy, followed by *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras*. *Dharmasutras* set out the rules of functioning of each Varna and the men of upper Varna were considered to be purer than others. The castes got affiliated with it because members of a caste often claim to belong to a certain Varna category and the anchoring of the jati system to the Varna system was in order to give the former the legitimacy of Brahminical tradition.<sup>2</sup> However, it is difficult to assign strict rankings among the castes as they maintained the aspect of fluidity within the Varna order. This was done by the practice of change in occupation, adopting vegetarianism, withdrawing of women into homes or by any other means.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 114

<sup>2</sup> Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: from the Stone Age to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century*, Pearson Publication, New Delhi, 2013, p. 293

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

## The Varna System in the Ancient Times

For our purpose to understand the fluidity or mobility within Varna hierarchy, a dynastic approach has been undertaken. This is because, firstly, it helps us in testifying the applicability of immobile or rigid Varna system. And secondly, it let us compare the theoretical aspect of Varna system with practical aspect of Varna system.

In all the cases cited below, along with all others that are not, there are some things in common; when one dynasty comes at the expense of another dynasty, it is but natural that the ruling elite of the succeeding dynasty, whosoever they might be, would raise their position in Varna order. While the members of the declining dynasty must have always lose their status because of their migration to other areas or adopting of other jobs or whatsoever it may be. Naturally, those who then attain the high statuses of the Varna tried to maintain it by invoking religious laws. The attainment of power must also have made them economically strong. While the earlier ruler and his nobility who, either have been destroyed or displaced, if not assimilated to the new power, must have become economically deprived.

**Mauryan Period:** However, Ashoka had adopted tolerant policy (after Kalinga) but his measures adversely affected Brahmins. Firstly, his edicts were not in Sanskrit but *Prakrit* (Brahmi script) which prevented Brahminical ideology to thrive. Secondly, his anti-sacrifice attitude affected the incomes of Brahmins. Lastly, his introduction of *vyavaharsamita* and *dandasamata* meant the same civil and criminal law for all *varnas*. But the Dharmasutras clearly referred to Varna discrimination. So, by now Varna hierarchy was not established in strict sense, at least until BC 185 (Destruction of Maurya Dynasty by Pushyamitra Sunga).

**Sunga Dynasty:** The strict and dominant Brahminical reaction came in the post Mauryan period as a reaction to the declining Buddhism in India, during the epoch of which (Mauryan period from Ashoka onwards), the wealth and power of Brahmins had fallen drastically. It was the Sunga Dynasty under Pushyamitra Sunga that succeeded Mauryan Dynasty (BC 185). This is one of the cases of class struggle in Ancient India, in which, those who were deprived of their wealth succeeded in ousting those, the patron of whom just ceased to exist.

**Satvahana Dynasty:** The local Andhra tribesmen that seemed to be brahmanised with time, ruled Central India under the title of Satvahanas. Its ruler, Gautamiputra Satkarni (106-30), declared himself to be the only Brahman. In fact, the Satvahanas ruled by declaring themselves the Brahmins. The dynasty that continued until AD 220 clearly gives us the inapplicability of the strict Varna hierarchy, yet the introduction of a tribe into Varna order.

**The Indo-Greeks, the Shakas, the Parthians and the Kushans:** They successively came one after another, starting from BC 200 down to AD 230 (Decline of Kushans). In general terms, they occupied North-Western region of India. They, being foreigners, yet got indianised in the course of time. Manu refers to them as warrior classes, *Kshatriyas*.

**The Gupta Empire (AD 335-455):** *Dharmasutras* refers to different titles that are attributed to different Varnas. Like *Sharma* to Brahmins, *Varman* to Kshatriyas, and *Gupta* to Vaisyas and *Dasa* to Sudras. So, the Guptas who were probably Vaisyas raised their order in Varna hierarchy by obtaining legitimacy from the Brahmins. R.S. Sharma has tried to point out that Guptas were the feudatories of Kushans.<sup>4</sup> According to Narada Smriti, the Brahmins received large scale gifts and later land endowments from the Guptas and in return they legitimised the status of the king by attributing him divine possessions.<sup>5</sup> So, a mutual balance of

<sup>4</sup>R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 231-232

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 241



kingship and Brahmanism was in practice. The foreign groups who came as conquerors were given *Kshatriya* status is also evident from the example of the Hunas, who came to India by the close of 5<sup>th</sup> century, but eventually came to be recognised as one of the thirty-six clans of the *Rajputs*. The introduction of tribals into the Varna order was essentially due to the land grants given to the Brahmans.

**South Indian Case:** The Satvahana was succeeded by Vakatakas, who seems to be Brahmans from the numerous copper plates which were issued to them for land grants. Then came the Chalukyas of Badami, who were local *Kanerese* people but claimed themselves to be Brahmans. In the Krishna Guntur region arose Ikshvakus, who again were local tribesmen but claimed themselves to be Brahmans. The Ikshvakus were replaced by Pallavas. The term Pallava in Tamil means robber, the attribute that Dharmasutras allotted to the Sudras. It is evident from the examples that Brahmanism was rising in the Southern states also but it is also evident that there were reactions against it. An important example would be the revolt of Kalabhra in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. They were the peasants who were against the *brahmadeya* land grants. They arose to be so strong that it was only through the joint efforts of the Pandyas, the Pallavas and the Chalukyas (Badami) that they could be quelled.

\*

The Varna system was based on such manner that the *Kshatriya* (king) levied taxes on the *Vaisyas* which was used to pay royal officials and the *Brahmans* (priests). The men of lower Varna attempted to raise their status in the Varna hierarchy by undertaking the functions of upper Varna order or by discarding the functions that they were supposed to perform. This, in the terms of *Purans*, is the age of Kaliyuga. In other words, they refused to pay taxes and provide free labour. These inter mixture of social classes that was taking place is known as *Varnasamkara*.<sup>6</sup>

**Indian Feudal Period:** The period of Indian feudalism suggests the struggle purely based on economic and political terms, in which religion was used just as a means to enforce the superior rights by the kings and brahmans. The grant of lands to the vassals, chiefs, priests, family members etc. by the bhumidah or king ensured not only effective administration of the vast empire but also revenue collection from the vast empire. There took increment in the cultivated area which assured more revenues to the state. It also led to the annexation of tribal population to the Brahminical system which tends to give the impression of uniform social system.

Land grants downgraded the position of peasants from *Vaisyas* to the *Sudras*, by creating a class of landlords between them and the king.<sup>7</sup> It means that the changeability of Varnas was not only taking place by raising the position in Varna hierarchy but by also falling in the lower order of Varna. In fact, Manu in *Manusmriti* himself marks out the formal statement that agriculture was one of the Vaisya occupations, though it was clearly held to be the lowliest of these; and the 'labourer in tillage' was Sudra.<sup>8</sup> By the seventh century A.D., Yuan Chwang would classify the peasants simply as Sudras.<sup>9</sup> This, apparently, diminished the economic opportunities of the peasants and increased that of the landlords. This is also because of the fact that Varna determined the economic rights of the people. Varahamihra, 6<sup>th</sup> century astrologer, tells us about the size of houses that varied according to the Varnas. Furthermore, the beneficiaries of land grants also had property claim over the indigenous population itself, it led to the decline of mass movement outside the region. This naturally increased the number of castes as a result of *Varnasamkara*.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 287

<sup>7</sup> R.S. Sharma, *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 290

<sup>8</sup> Irfan Habib, 'The Peasant in Indian History', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Marx Centenary Number (Mar., 1983), p. 33

<sup>9</sup> T. Watters, *On Yuang Chwan's Travels in India*, London, 1904, Vol. I, pp. 168-169, Cf. R.S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1958, pp. 232-234 [as cited in Irfan Habib, 'The Peasant in Indian History', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Marx Centenary Number (Mar., 1983), p. 33.

Most of the chiefs of the feudal states that existed before the Turkish conquest began to call themselves *Kshatriya* over the time because of accumulation of wealth and power.

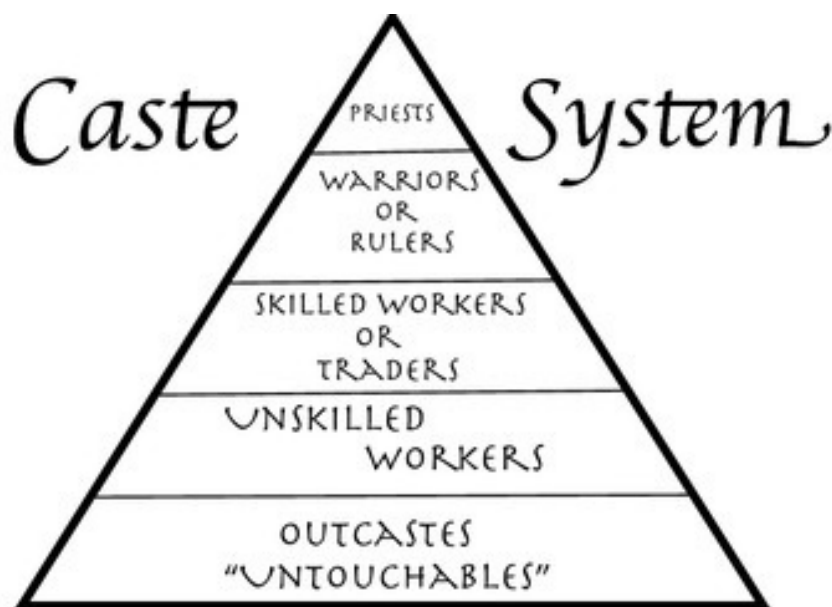
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### Changes in Varna during Medieval Period

After the establishment of Delhi Sultanate down to the decline of Mughal Empire, since the Emperor had to obey no concept of Varna for legitimising his position, the interchangeability of position in Varna hierarchy now began taking place between those Hindus who served in the imperial service or those who were commoners. The institution of Varna which was moving towards rigidity was at once broken by the Muslim rulers of India. Since, the Brahmins were no more involved in determining the nature of the state, their influence must have reduced. However, the Hindus were left to deal with their own way of civil and criminal justices, based on *Dharmasutras*, yet there remained a Chief Qazi over them. However, there is no clear evidence of mass conversions during the medieval period, nevertheless, whatsoever amount of conversions that might have taken place must have challenged the applicability of Varna order to some extent. But it was not so that the concept of men dominating the political scenario under the *Kshatriya* concept totally swept away. Rajput rajas continued to dominate large tracts of countryside as well as centrally administered areas of Punjab, the doab, Bihar, Gujarat. Hindu *rais*, in fact, welcomed Balban in Awadh after his victory over Tughril. Later, when Firoz Shah Tughlak invaded Bengal, he was joined by *rais* of eastern UP, the most important of them being Udai Singh, the Rai of Gorakhpur and Champaran.

During the Tughlaq period, Mohammad bin Tughlak's appointments of inferior classes or castes of Hindus also, apart from Muslims, such as barbers, gardeners, cooks etc. to high offices must have not only induced resentments among the superior classes or castes but also have challenged their Varna supremacy. On the other hand, the Khuts, muqaddams and choudhuris transformed themselves into the autonomous unit by the end Lodi period and began calling themselves Rajputs

Besides those who were already settled, depended on lands for livelihood, serving the Central Empire, receiving royal favours (either Brahmins or Rajputs) or otherwise maintaining their Varna position during Mughal rule, there were still other groups that were being maintaining fluid trend in the caste based Varna system.



The nomadic pastoral economy, in the region of the Punjab, was unable to fulfil their requirements as the Mughal state had taken upon itself the task of protecting peasantry. This practically ended the loot and plunders and forced the pastoralists to move towards agriculture. Certain section of Jats appear to have moved to the Punjab and wherever *geo climatic* situation permitted, they probably abandoned their predominantly pastoral habits and settled in favour of agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Chetan Singh, 'Conformity and Conflict: Tribes and the 'Agrarian System' of Mughal India', in Muzaffar Alam & Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Eds.), *Oxford in India Readings: Themes in Indian History, The Mughal State 1526-1750*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p. 421-448

Apart from *Jats*, in the northern and north western region of Indian subcontinent also existed tribes like *Gujjar*, *Bhatti*, *Gakkhars* etc. The settlement of these tribes had not been completed as late as British rule. Their absorption in agrarian system made them fundamentally and characteristically different from each other as that section which had merged with agricultural society exchanged their tribal identity for some kind of a caste system in a multicultural hierarchical society. The *Jats*, for example, were considered to be *Sudras* in earlier centuries but by 18<sup>th</sup> they came to be known as *Vaisyas*. Their 'Sudra' identity and for that matter even 'Vaisya' identity might have been unconsciously acquired, however, after acquiring the upper status there never took downward trend. This suggests of the consciousness that must have arisen with the gain of upper status because of the availability of more resources and opportunities that were not known to them until they were unconscious *Shudras*.

It is not different from what Irfan Habib suggests i.e. by the first century A.D., the Taxila excavations give us firm indications of the occurrence of some of the technological devices (shears, rotary querns). The new full-time professions must have led to a separation of the artisan communities (smiths and carpenters) from the peasantry; the Jatakas introduce us to 'manufacturers' villages' exclusively peopled by smiths or carpenters. These formed the basis of the new occupational *jatis*, the 'mixed castes' of Manu, which include those of carpenters, charioteers and physicians.<sup>11</sup>

In the region of Awadh, during the period of 18<sup>th</sup> century, we get to know of many conflicts which took place different castes for economic and political reasons.<sup>12</sup> For instance, conflict between Bhumihaar Brahman and Rajputs in Banaras region.<sup>13</sup>

From the above discussions we can draw the conclusion that up till 18<sup>th</sup> century the changes in the Varna structure was not religiously bound but politically bound. The political texts like *Dharmasutras*, bounded in religious colours, give us the theoretical aspect of social structure which was far away from the practical aspect. Its actual invocation was confined to the upholding of superordinate position in the society and not permanent subordination of masses. This is because, if such was the case, then there could not have been the fluidity in the Varna structure. Moreover, in the functioning of Varna system, *Kshatriya* was never really subordinate to the *Brahman* as it was the *Kshatriya* (ruler) who employed, patronised, favoured or disfavoured the *Brahman* as per the need of time. This aspect questions the whole applicability of Varna system.

## The Development of Rigidity in Varna System

The Varna order and castes within it, however, existed in pre colonial period but were not so much absolute in nature. The system culminated into "absolute" Varna hierarchy during modern phase of Indian history. The society was frozen at the structure in which the masses stood at that period of time. Those who stood at the upper level of Varna, thenceforth, remained only beneficiaries of social division. The system of Varna fluidity ended and British presence made a significant contribution to it.

Nicholas B. Dirks in his *Castes of Mind* says that colonialism was itself a cultural project of control, based on knowledge. Cultural forms in societies newly classified as "traditional" were reconstructed and transformed by this knowledge, which created new categories and oppositions between colonizers and colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East.<sup>14</sup> He further says that the caste was just one category among many others like regional, village or residential community, kingship groups, factional parties, chiefly contingents and so on.<sup>15</sup> These could supersede caste as an identity but under

<sup>11</sup> Manu puts mixed castes lower than the Sudras. See, Manu, X, 47-48 (tr. Buhler), p 413 [as cited in Irfan Habib, 'The Peasant in Indian History', Social Scientist, Vol. 11, No. 3, Marx Centenary Number (Mar., 1983), p. 33]

<sup>12</sup> Muzaffar Alam, 'Aspects of Agrarian Uprisings in North India in the Early Eighteenth Century'. In Muzaffar Alam & 13 Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Eds.), *Oxford in India Readings: Themes in Indian History, The Mughal State 1526- 1750*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 449-473

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001, p. 9

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.13

colonialism caste was made out to be far more pervasive, totalising and uniform than it had ever been.

Bernard Cohn has argued that the British simultaneously misinterpreted and oversimplified the features they saw in Indian society, placing Indians into stereotypical boxes they defined and into which they were assigned in the name of ancient tradition. They reduced vastly complex codes and their associated meanings to a few metonyms. Once the British had defined to their own satisfaction what they construed as Indian rules and customs, then the Indians had to conform to these constructions.<sup>16</sup>

Shashi Tharoor in his book, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India* opines: “they (British) began by anatomizing Indian society into 'classes' that they referenced as being 'primarily religious' in nature. They then seized upon caste. But caste had not been a particularly stable social structure in the pre-British days; though there were, of course, variants across time and place, caste had broadly been a mobile form of social organization constantly shaped and reinvented by the beliefs, the politics and quite often the economic interests of the dominant men of the times. The British, however, promulgated the theory that caste hierarchy and discrimination influenced the workings of Indian society. This is arguably a very narrow definition of how Indian society actually functioned in the pre-British era, and it is thanks to colonial rule that it has now become conventional wisdom.”<sup>17</sup>

**The British-Brahmans:** The formulation of Code of Gentoo Laws made the rigidity of Varna even more pervasive. The opportunity was made available to the Brahmans by Governor-General Warren Hastings to design laws based on religious Indian texts. The pandits were thus provided opportunity to design a system favourable to their own castes and unfavourable to lower castes. This served to magnify the problem of caste hierarchy in the country. Prior to the British conquest of India, the solution to the disputes or any other sort of problems was sought by the members of the same community or caste, on the basis of their own traditions and laws. But now, they not only had to accept the arbitration of the men from upper Varna but also had to dispose their traditions so as to get confirmed to the laws of Pandits. The most learned of British Orientalists, William Jones, who in 1797 founded the Asiatic Society in Calcutta and served in the Supreme Court of Judicature, remarked, 'I can no longer bear to be at the Mercy of our pandits who deal out Hindu Law as they please, and make it at reasonable rates, when they cannot find it readymade'. But Jones died tragically young and his wisdom was not replicated in his successors.<sup>18</sup>

**The Role of Census:** The census reconfirmed the process of defining castes, allocating them certain attributes and inventing extraordinary labels for entire communities, such as 'martial races' and 'criminal tribes'.<sup>19</sup> Prior to British rule, the Shudra needed only to abandon his place of residence for some other place or in some other princely state to try his fortune where his caste would not have followed him.<sup>20</sup> But the Census made him/her the Shudra for life, wherever he was. Herbert Risley, census commissioner for the 1901 census and author of the compendious *The People of India*, took an anthropological and eugenicist approach, making physical measurements of Indian skulls and noses on the then-fashionable assumption that such physical qualities reflected racial stereotypes.<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, in their zeal for classification, the British even subsumed ancient, and not dishonourable, professions like devadasis (temple dancers) or baijis (court musicians) into a rough-and-ready category of 'prostitutes', thus casting them out for the first time from respectable society<sup>22</sup>

**.Technology:** The technological development amidst the social fallibility united the people on caste lines and thus made identity of a person more identifiable. The availability of cheap news- print facilitated the

<sup>16</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among The Historians And Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, 1987 [as cited in Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 122-123]

<sup>17</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 123-124

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 125-126

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp. 127-131

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid



founding of caste journals, whose aim was to promote the interests of their respective caste.<sup>23</sup> The watchdog of non- Brahman interests, the newspaper Justice, was founded on February 26, 1917, and it was followed by the starting of other similar newspapers, Kudiarasu and Dravidar (Tamil), and Samadarshini (Telugu)<sup>24</sup>. M.N. Srinivas writes that “The building of roads all over India, and the introduction of railways, postage, telegraph, cheap paper, and printing-especially in the regional languages- enabled castes to organize as they had never done before. A postcard carried news of a caste meeting, and the railway enabled members scattered in far-flung villages to come together when necessary, while the availability of cheap news- print facilitated the founding of caste journals, whose aim was to promote the interests of their respective castes. The availability of cheap paper enabled caste disputes to be recorded, and this gave permanent form to rules and precedents which were till then dependent upon the fallible, and therefore challengeable, memory of elders.

**Land Revenue Systems of British Empire<sup>25</sup>:** In the Permanent Settlement, *zamindars* were made the owner of the mortgage, who could bequeath or sell lands. The cultivators were thus reduced to the low status of mere tenants and were deprived from long standing rights to the land. In the *Ryotwari* Settlement, *ryots* mostly failed to meet the revenue demands that made them the debtors of the money lenders. And, in the *Mahalwari* Settlement, village communities remained ruined by high revenue demands mounting debt burdens, arrears of revenue, the sale of their proprietary and dispossession through the decrees of civil courts.

In all the cases, land revenue demands ultimately led to the transfer of lands to 'high' non agricultural castes

**New Education System:** English was studied as a language in India but after 1835 William Bentinck on Macaulay's advice, made English medium of instruction in Indian education.<sup>26</sup> Colonial power worked on the basis of “Downward Filtration” and concentrated on educating upper class elite because they only possessed wisdom and leisure for learning English. Once these men were trained they could act as teachers and educate the regional masses and percolate elementary education to the masses.<sup>27</sup> The lower, under privileged and untouchable castes could hardly take advantage of an education. As a result, the lower caste people were either denied education or had to face discrimination. This resulted in the falling back of the lower castes (men without means) in the era when the upper castes (men with means) were moving towards the so called “civilised culture”.

**Role of Christian Missionaries:** Charles Grant in *Observation on the State of Society* had argued that English education and Christian missionary could transform the degenerated culture of India. The missionaries started running printing press and translated Bible in local languages. The Charter Act of 1813 allowed the missionaries to travel to India. The people from lower stratum of the society, including the tribes, were being given admissions to the hospitals run by them and an opportunity for an education. This

<sup>23</sup> M.N. Srinivas, 'Caste in Modern India', The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Aug., 1957), pp. 529-548

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> **Permanent Settlement** (Bengal): As the revenue demanded was very high, to extract maximum profit, the rate of revenue was fixed at 89%, leaving only 11% to zamindars. It led to regressive tax collection methods by the zamindars. It was also because the zamindar was replaced if he failed to collect the adequate revenue amount.

**Ryotwari Settlement** (Madras and Bombay): To eliminate the zamindars, the cultivator was recognised as the owner of the plot but was subject to the payment of land revenue, initially fixed between 45% and 55%. However, this system again proved to be oppressing as the revenue officials combined themselves with the duties of police in the countryside which resulted in bribery and corruption.

**Mahalwari Settlement:** The village or *mahal* lands jointly belonged to the village community called the body of co shares. It was jointly responsible for the payment of land revenue. The high revenue demands often invited opposition from taluqdars; as a result, taluqdars were driven off from their lands. Holt Mackenzie in 1822 introduced the survey of land and the land revenue was set at 80%, when payable by zamindars, and 95%, when payable by cultivators in common tenancy. This system, however, broke down and a new system came, devised by R.M. Bird and land revenue was then set at 66%.

See, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India*, Second Edition, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, Hyderabad (Telangana), 2015, pp. 82-95

<sup>26</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Columbia University Press, New York, p. 44

<sup>27</sup> Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India*, Second Edition, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, Hyderabad (Telangana), 2015, p. 142



naturally attracted a large number of people towards the foreign missionaries. Thus, ultimately, through religious conversion, their status could no longer be legitimately degraded by those who, thenceforth, remained the only Brahman or for that matter upper class.

**Social Reform Movements:** All of these movements condemned the concept of pollution and untouchability and aimed at social uplifting. But there were setbacks in the movement itself. Most of these movements were being led by high caste people, and though they advocated for the rights of socially ridden populace, no men of lower castes were actually made participants in these movements. So, the low castes had no emotion attached to these movements. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the contributions that were made by men like E.V. Ramaswamy Naiker, Shri Narayan Guru, Jyotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, and so on. However, independent India failed to maintain the ethos and legacy that these leaders bestowed upon us.

It would thus not be incorrect to conclude that British Empire succeeded in dividing Indian society and Indians failed in upholding their unity. The rigidity in Varna system was formalised.

The process that took place during the modern period solidified the caste group at its own position.

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## **POLITICISED CASTES AND THEIR STRUGGLE**

Many provisions were made for the welfare of Schedule Castes and Scheduled tribes in India, these include, reserved seats for these groups in the parliament/state legislatures, government/semi-government services and educational institutions.

It is to be noted here that amongst the reserved classes, Scheduled Castes and OBCs fared well in comparison to Scheduled Tribes.<sup>28</sup> This is because the scheduled tribes had historically remained out of the Brahminical culture and had lesser knowledge of ways and means that could have help them in exploiting opportunities.<sup>29</sup> However, many of the tribals who had been annexed to the Brahminical culture had by time changed their identity to some caste group.

## **Conclusion**

The process that took place during the modern period solidified the caste group at its own. Today, the Varna system has been replaced by the caste system. It intensified the conflicts from four-fold order to thousands of caste orders. While people cutting across castes came together during independence movement against the British, the fault lines could never be wedged. The political parties began to concern themselves with votes and the backward classes became merely the vote banks.

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<sup>28</sup> Virginius Xaxa, 'Protective Discrimination: Why Scheduled Tribes Lag Behind Scheduled Castes', Economic and Political Weekly: A Sameeksha Trust Publication, Mumbai, 2001

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

## **A Brief overview of Historical Works Of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan**

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Syed Ahmad Khan was born in Delhi on 17th October 1817 in a noble family. His family had its ancestral roots in Arabia. Altaf Hussain Hali, Syed Ahmad's biographer writes that his ancestors had perhaps come to India for the first time during the reign of Emperor Shahjahan and since then till the reign of Emperor Akbar II, they remained connected with the royal family in one way or another<sup>1</sup>.

Syed Ahmad was around 22 years old when in 1838 his father Syed Muttaqi Muhammad passed away after which Syed Ahmad decided to join the service of British Government instead of seeking employment in the Mughal Court. He was first appointed to the post of *Sar rishta dar* (chief record keeper) of minor criminal court. Later on he was appointed as *Naib Munshi* (subordinate clerk) at Agra in 1839 and then promoted to the post of *Munshi* in 1840.

Our memory remembers Sir Syed as a Muslim social reformer and an educationist who founded Muhammadan Anglo Oriental College which later became Aligarh Muslim University. However we tend to overlook other aspect of his multifaceted personality which was a combination of a social reformer, an educationist, a political ideologue, a journalist, a writer, a historian, an archeologist and above all a humanist who challenged orthodoxy.

The purpose of writing this article is to look into one such aspect of Sir Syed's personality i.e. Sir Syed as a historian. In this article i will be briefly mentioning the historical works written by him and discussing in detail the two editions of his most important work *Asar us Sanadid*.

### **Sir Syeds Historical Works:**

*JAM-I-JAM*: This work is translated as Jamshed's Cup was published in 1840. This was the first book that Sir Syed wrote which dealt with history. It was written in Persian and had as its content in chronological order the list of rulers of Delhi from Timur to Bahadur Shah II.

*SILSILAT-UL-MULUK*: This work is translated as Chain of Kings, published in 1852. This is a brief but useful of those rulers who had ruled Delhi during the past 5000 years. The list starts with Raja Yudhishtra and ends with Qaiser-i-Hind, Empress Victoria. The list consists of 202 rulers with the name of their father, the year of accession, their capitals and the duration of their reign. This is the same list which is provided in the second chapter of the second edition of *Asar us Sanadid*.

When Sir Syed was transferred from Delhi to Bijnore as the permanent Sadr Ameen of the district then he undertook two works. Firstly, he wrote the history of Bijnore District and then he revised *Ain-i- Akbari*.

*TARIKH-I-BIJNORE*: When Sir Syed came to Bijnore, he found a circular issued from the Sadr board which stated that after the land revenue arrangements of the district were completed then a detailed history of the district should be written down. He took up the task with full zeal and diligence. This is not of much interest except the Qanungos of that district had some papers belonging to the reign of Akbar and Alamgir, these papers were been reproduced by Sir Syed in the book. But the manuscript of the book was in the office of Sadr board when the revolt broke out and along with other papers this work was lost.

*REVISION OF AIN-I-AKBARI*: *Ain-i-Akbari* is one of the most important and revered text of medieval

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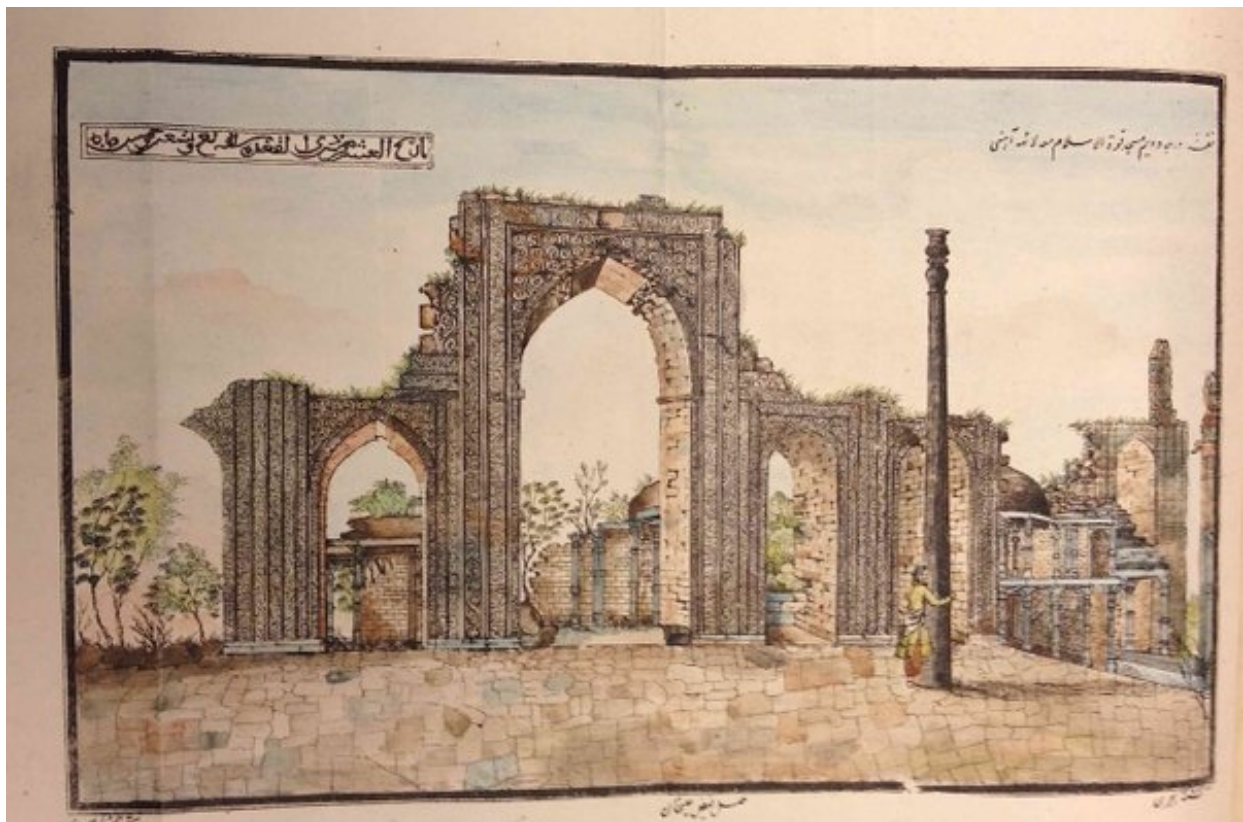
<sup>1</sup>Hali, Altaf Hussain, *Hayat-i-Jawed*, Tr. Rafi Ahmad Alavi, Sir Syed Academy, Aligarh, 2008, pp 01-09.

Indian history written during the reign of Emperor Akbar by his famous court historian Abul Fazl. This work is unique as it is different in language and style from all the works written prior to it. The subject matter of this work was new to Persian language and therefore it didn't make an interesting read for the masses. Also the scribes had made many mistakes while copying the text. Thus the revision of the text after so many years was a difficult task yet Sir Syed took up the challenge and successfully accomplished the revision. For the purpose of revision he collected different copies, compared them and then revised accordingly. Afterwards he also produced a glossary of unfamiliar words of Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Hindi and Sanskrit. He also explained the various terms of Akbar's reign. The original Ain had very few illustrations, Syed Ahmad got famous artists of Delhi to draw sketches, illustrations and introduced them at proper places. And when in 1873, Blochmann wrote the English translation of Ain, he made use of these pictures.

*TARIKH-I-SARKASHI-I-BIJNORE*: In this work Sir Syed has given a detailed account of the events of the revolt that took place in Bijnore District from May 1857 to April 1858. This book provides a detailed account of events related to the revolt without any partiality or biasness.

*ASBAB-I-BAGHAWAT-HIND\**: This work is translated as the Causes of the Indian Revolt. Through this book Sir Syed tried to acquit the Indians and specially Muslims who had been misunderstood by the British Government and other Europeans and have been wrongly charged of accusation of causing the uprising. In this book he gives a detailed account of various events that took place in the course of the revolt and also tried to find out the real cause (s) of the revolt.

This book is worthy of praise as it was written down at a time when the government considered Muslims as its enemy. And since Syed Ahmad had been declared as a government loyalist so any attempt of criticizing it might not have been received well. Despite this knowledge he wrote this work and refuted the idea of the British Officials and boldly said that they were wrong in blaming the Muslims for the revolt.



Illustrations in *Asar-al Sanadid*

\*Also *Asbab-i-Baghawat-Hindustan*

According to him the real causes for the outbreak of the revolt were<sup>2</sup>:

- First, non-admission of natives in the legislative councils. The masses felt alienated and found no means through which they could express their feelings.
- Secondly, passing of laws and regulations which were contradictory to the established customs and practices of Hindustan.
- Thirdly, the management and disaffection of the army.
- Fourthly, interference in religious matters. The masses were apprehensive and believed that the British Government intended to force the Christian religion and foreign customs upon Hindus and Muslims alike.

REVISION OF TARIKH-I-FIROZSHAHI: Sir Syed revised Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi* while he was at Moradabad. The Asiatic society of Bengal wanted to publish this book and thus requested Sir Syed to send its corrected copy. For the purpose of revision he collected four different copies and revised the book with the help of these copies. This revised edition was published in 1862.

ASAR-US-SANADID: This work is translated as the Remnant Signs of Ancient Heroes<sup>3</sup> is the major work of Sir Syed which won him the attention of British Officials and established his reputation as a historian. Hali writes, when Sir Syed was appointed as *Munsif* in Delhi, he thought of doing research on the buildings of Delhi and its suburbs. And later on to supplement his income he decided to publish a book on the buildings of Delhi.

Sir Syed along with his friend Imam Bakhsh surveyed the buildings and old monuments of Delhi. It was a difficult and arduous task as length, breadth and height of every building was noted down, the copies of every inscription was reproduced and also the dilapidated buildings had to be produced in their exact form. Finally Sir Syed was able to produce a research work on more than 125 buildings. Sir Syed himself writes that, "in order to read the inscription on the Qutb Minar, a basket was suspended between scaffolds parallel to the inscription, he would then sit in that basket and copy down the inscriptions."<sup>4</sup>

Asar-us-Sanadid is the most impressive achievement of Sir Syed. There are two editions of this work which are published seven years apart, they have same title yet they are very different from each other. The edition I of 1847 consists of a substantial preface followed by four chapters.

- The first chapter is about the buildings outside the city. Total 130 buildings have been mentioned.
  - The second chapter is about Red Fort and buildings inside it. It mentions 32 buildings along with its plan and inscriptions.
  - The third chapter is about the buildings of *Shahjahanabad* which gives account of 70 mansions, mosques, markets, temples, etc.
  - The fourth chapter is about famous personalities of Delhi. It lists some 117 men.

In this edition, the book is dedicated to Sir Thomas Theophilus Metcalfe. The language of his edition is highly ornate and flowery and extremely rhetorical. There are more than 130 illustrations in this edition which are drawn by Faiz Ali Khan and Mirza Shahrukh Beg. It is among the first books produced in India which has illustrations in it.

C.M.Naim in his article, 'Syed Ahmad and his two books called *Asar-al-Sanadid*' brings into questioning the authorship of the first edition of this work. He has based this argument on Hali's statement in *Hayat-i-Jawed*: "Sir Syed himself acknowledge, the first edition of *Asar-al-Sanadid*, whose language is much contrived and ornamented, was written by Imam Bakhsh." Imam Bakhsh, as mentioned earlier was Sir Syed's friend who helped with research.

<sup>2</sup> Graham, G.F.I., *The Life and Work of Syed Ahmad Khan*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1885, pp 33-37

<sup>3</sup> Naim, C.M., 'Syed Ahmad Khan and his Two Books called *Asar-al-Sanadid*', *Modern Asian Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 01

<sup>4</sup> Altaf Hussain Hali, *Hayat-i-Jawed*





Imam Bakhsh had a reputation for doing Ghostwriting.<sup>5</sup> Naim believes that most of the preface, including panegyric and much of the fourth chapter was composed by Imam Bakhsh as they reflect his writing style. While the rest of the work which is full of anecdotes, personal references show that they were composed by Sir Syed. So Naim concludes that the first edition of *Asar* was in fact a collaborative work of Sir Syed and Imam Bakhsh.

Christian Troll, while analysing the difference between two editions writes that the first edition, 'fits into the pattern of earlier topographical and biographical writing in Persian'<sup>6</sup>. for this purpose he mentions Mirza Sangin Beg's 'Sair-al-Manazil'. Naim refuting this argument of Troll concludes that though the subject matter of both books are similar i.e. Delhi and its monuments, yet they differ in organisation, quality and quantity of historical information and other details in the book.

The second edition published in 1854, differs considerably from the 1847 edition. All the additions are mentioned by the author in the preface of this work. The difference between two editions is evident from the title page. In edition I we have a very ornate and designful title page where information is given in Persian. While the title page of second edition is simple and in plain font and the information is given in Urdu language. This edition (1854) also mentions in the list of rulers the names of British sovereigns alongside Mughal kings from 1803 onwards.

In this edition there are no illustrations. And it doesn't have chapter four which is about Delhi and its people. The verbosity of the first edition is replaced by brevity and preciseness. And also this edition is not dedicated to anyone.

The changes in the two editions have been linked to the changes in his social and political outlook. When this book was presented before Royal Asiatic Society in London by Arthur Roberts, the society asked for its English translation. It was during this process of translation that Sir Syed realised the error of this work and decided to improve the work and in the process he completely revised the edition. In this edition much emphasis was given on chronology. And also during this period, Sir Syed in 1852 was made a member of Archeological Society of Delhi which was founded in 1847. His engagements with Archeological Society of Delhi and Europeans had impacted his writing style as now the language was much simpler and only those things were mentioned in text which were of historical value and any sort of digressions were also avoided by the author. In the second edition, Sir Syed appears as a pragmatic historian whose only concern is to mention those things which are of historical value.

*Asar-us-Sanadid* also indicates author's awareness about the importance of use of source material in writing history. He has given a list of original sources which he used in compiling *Asar*.<sup>7</sup>

Sir Syed, as pointed out earlier has edited *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl (1855), *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi* of Ziauddin Barani (1862), *Tujuk-i-Jahangir* of Jahangir (1864), all these works signifies that Sir Syed was much influenced by western scholarship where emphasis was placed on textual study of original documents. Thus it can be concluded Sir Syed had a keen interest in history and his treatment of history shows he influence of western liberalism and scholarship something which is missing in his religious writings.

<sup>5</sup> It was believed that Qadir Bakhsh Sabir's *Gulistan-i-Sukhan* was actually written by Imam Bakhsh. see C.M.Naim's 'Shaikh Imam Bakhsh Sahbai'i: Teacher, Scholar, Poet, and Puzzle master.' in Margrit Pernau (ed.), *The Delhi College* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 145-185

<sup>6</sup> Troll, Christian, 'A Note on an Early Topographical Work of Sayyid Ahmad Khān: "Āsār al-Sanādīd"', *The Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No.2, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 142

<sup>7</sup> Faruqi, Z.H., *Historians of Medieval India*, ed. Mohibul Hasan, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1968, p. 236



## Major Contemporary Historians Under Akbar

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The age of Akbar was not only prolific in historical literature but it also registered a definite advance in medieval historiographical traditions. It studies the historical landscape from different angles and reflects diverse points of view; imperial, sectarian and feminine. It represents Persian language in various shades and forms. It also seeks to weave Medieval Indian History in the broad pattern of Indian History and looks upon



Basharat Saleem Parray making his presentation on May 20, 2017

Indian culture heritage as a totality and considers Muslim contribution to cultural life as a part and parcel of this historical legacy. It attempts collection of data of large scale archival material available to contemporary historians. Akbar was keenly interested from different considerations. On one side, he wanted to follow the course of Islamic history. On the other side, He was anxious to see Medieval Indian history written in its Indian background. He had fully inherited Timurid interest in history and wanted an indelible stamp of the canvas of History. Some of his remarks clearly indicate that he looked upon a retrospect of the past as a means to rectify the present. For him History was not merely a pleasant intellectual excursion into the past but an instrument of pragmatic significance to influence social outlook and political behavior. Anxious to evolve a National culture and a national outlook, he sought to broaden the vision of his contemporaries and infuse in them the consciousness of belonging to one culture.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the Timurid love of history blossomed in Akbar in whose reign four major Histories were written, besides other works of historical interest. Of the four, two were official histories written at the instance of the Emperor himself. They are the *Tarikh-i-Alfi* and the monumental *Akbarnama*. By the time *Akbarnama* was issued from the hands of the great Abul Fazl, two unofficial histories had been already written of the reign of the great emperor *Tabiqat-i-Akbari* of Nizamuddin Ahmad and the hostile

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<sup>1</sup>Nizami, K A, *On History And Historians of Medieval India*, Munshiram Manoharlal publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, pp. No. 224

*Muntakhab ut Tawarikh* of Abdul Qadir Badauni. The two works are important for a proper understanding of Akbar's reign as they serve as necessary correctives to the laudatory account of Abul Fazl.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore setting the model for Timurid history writing, the greatest historical work with which it took *Zafarnama* for its model but undoubtedly went much beyond of it is Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* first text completed in 1596. This official History of Babur, Humayun and Akbar not only used a large amount of archival material, but also a number of especially commissioned Memoirs among which only few survive such as those of *Humayunnama* of Gulbadan Begum and *Tazkira-i-Humayun o Akbar* of Bayazid Bayat as well as historical narratives especially sponsored to provide material of which Abbas Sarwani's work mentioned above is one. AbulFazl has a much larger vision of history, what came to be considered a separate work, *The A'in-i-Akbari* containing massive fiscal, financial and social data, a detailed provincial Gazetteer and a cultural history of India. The Work provides a fairly firm baseline for a quantitative history of India. It is also remarkable in being without any religious bias and in treating Indian culture as a composite one to which both Hindu and Muslim traditions have contributed. Akbar's reign saw the production of the first general history of India i.e. Nizamuddin's *Tabiqat-i-Akbari*. Especially notable was his endeavor to reconstruct the history of provincial dynasties as part of the political history of India. He was followed by Qasim Hindu Shah 'Firishta' who in his *Gulshan-i-Ibrahim* (1606-7) gave detailed history of the country. Abdul Qadir Badauni completed his *Muntakhab ut Tawarikh* in 1595-96, another history of India which draws much of its information from Nizamuddin's work. But he concentrates on Akbar's reign, of whose events he gives a trenchantly critical interpretation from an orthodox point of view. His biographical sketches of scholars and other celebrities in his concluding portion forms a special feature of his work.<sup>3</sup>

### Abul Fazl

He was born in 1551 at Agra. His father, Shaikh Mubarak, was a scholar of tolerant and liberal views; indeed tolerant enough to be suspected of heretical inclinations. He was also heavily influenced by Ibn Al-Arabi's pantheistic philosophy. Abul Fazl received from his father the best available education in Islamic conventional sciences and Sufi writings. He read historical literature in Persian and Arabic, as well as some of the important philosophical writings, notably those of Abu Sina and Ibn Al Arabi. In 1573, at the age of 22 he was introduced to Akbar by his elder brother Faizi. By 1580-81 he had moved well into Akbar's inner circle. Jesuits describe him as being Akbar's chief secretary and advisor. He was, they say, fairly liberal and tolerant, quite respectful of Christianity and a believer in the essential unity of all religious views that are in congruence with his later writings. He soon began to delight the Emperor by contesting the positions of the established theologians in discussion in the emperor's presence at the Ibadat khana, at Fatehpur Sikri in 1578-79. His tendency then to criticize and show up the weakness of the traditional scholars is noted by Badauni.<sup>4</sup> It was in the 1580s that the plan to write a grand history of the reign of Akbar took shape. Abul Fazl planned to write a History of Akbar (*Akbarnama*), with a view to not only giving a detailed narrative of the Mughal dynasty (since Babur), but also of Akbar's empire; administration, and culture of the Indian people. Abul Fazl was able to write three volumes, two of the narrative part and the *Ain*. The first volume covers the history of mankind from Adam to the first seventeen years of Akbar's reign. The second volume brings the narrative to the close of the 46<sup>th</sup> regnal year of Akbar. The volume, the *Ain-i-Akbari* had practically been written by the end of the 42<sup>nd</sup> regnal year with a small addition pertaining to the conquest of Berar which took place in the 43<sup>rd</sup> year. In other words, the two volumes of his *Akbarnama* record the events of Akbar's reign, preceded by an account of the reign of Babur and Humayun, his Grandfather and father. The 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of what was ostensibly a single work was devoted exclusively to the recording the *Ain-i-Maqaddas-i-Shahi* (The Sacred Imperial Regulations). This is conveniently styled by a kind of early consensus among readers as the *Ain-i-Akbari* and in practically all manuscripts it is separated from the *Akbarnama*. The subject matter here concerns the organization of Akbar's court, administration, army, revenues, and the geography of his empire and the traditions and culture of the people he governed.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sreedharan, E, A Text of Historiography, Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Ali, M Athar, Mughal India, OUP, Delhi, 2006, pp. 370-372

<sup>4</sup> 'Indo-Persian Historiography', Shireen Moosvi in *Different Types of History*, ed. Bharti Ray, Delhi, 2009, p. 3-5

<sup>5</sup> Mukhia, Harbans *Historians and Historiography During The Reign Of Akbar*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1980, pp. 41-42

The *Akbarnama* was completed in 1596, although the narrative was extended further every year till 1601. The *Ain*'s statistics were probably given their basic form in 40 regnal year(1596).<sup>6</sup>

Abul Fazl's chief historical work, The *Akbarnama* and its supplement, The *Ain-i- Akbari* rank amongst some of the finest in the whole range of Persian historical literature. The *Ain-i Akbari* in particular is a unique of its type. Nothing at all resembling it, remarks V.A.Smith was ever compiled in Asia and it would be difficult to find an authoritative compilation of this type even in Europe. In fact Abul Fazl may be regarded a pioneer in the field of collection and utilization of statistical data for the purposes of historical study.<sup>7</sup>

As far as AbulFazl's conception of history is concerned, we find here two curious assumptions; Akbar is treated as the focal point in his writings. Secondly, Akbar is identified with the wellbeing of India. In other words Abul Fazl treats Akbar's personality as being central to historical process,a process that,in hisunderstanding,has a deep association with India. With regard to his first identification, that between Akbar and history, Abul Fazl argues that Akbar stands in a peculiarly intimate between God and the sovereign, but there are very few sovereigns who deserve to be and are blessed by that connection; Akbar is one of those few. One should however, not misled into believing that Abul Fazl accepts the Divine Right Theory of kingship, he says come into being as the result of an original contact, where by chosen sovereign assured protection to the people and the people in return undertook to pay him taxes. But once the institution of sovereignty came into being, the king became the shadow of God on earth or his representative. Par taking the divine qualities, the sovereign should not consider himself bound by any religion or faith; just as God's compassion is for everyone, so should be that of the king. Abul Fazl therefore, combines the Greek Sophist's theory of Social Contract with IbnArabi's pantheistic philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

As far as his second identification, that between Akbar and India goes, Abul Fazl shows not only an understanding of India as a country with a separate historical identity of its own, but also demonstrates a

deep attachment to the culture and the people of Indian. He shows a remarkable interest in the geography, culture, religions and rituals of the Indian people. In that respect, he is the first cultural historian of India after the great Al Beruni, although he lacks Al Beruni's comprehension and critical capacities.<sup>9</sup> In other words, there is no doubt that Abul Fazl was more conscious of the geography of India than any previous writer. In the north he considered the great mountain ranges to separate India from Turan (Central Asia) and Iran on one side and China on the other. The following passage from his pen was long an aid to the arguments of those British strategists who would place the 'Scientific Frontier' of the Raj across the heart of Afghanistan. He writes "Intelligent men of the past have considered Kabul and Qandhar as the twin gates of Hindustan, one Qandhar for the passage of Iran and the other for that of Turan. By guarding these two places, Hindustan obtains peace from alien(raider), and global traffic by these two routes can prosper".

He claims, however that "Hindustan also included 'Srandip' (Sri Lanka), Achin (Sumtra), Maluk (Malaya) and many islands, so that the sea cannot really demarcate its limits."

AbulFazl displays his patriotism by showering unqualified praise on the people of India, "The people of this country are God



Akbarnamah

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Nizami, p. 230

<sup>8</sup> Moosvi,p.6

<sup>9</sup> Athar Ali, pp. 109-110, Nizami, p. 230



Seeking, generous Hearted, friendly to strangers, pleasant faced, broad forehead, patron of learning, inclined to justice, hardworking, efficient, true to salt, truth seeking, attached to loyalty.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, there is no doubt that AbulFazl's description of Indian culture running to about 150 pages of the large folio edition in Persian as an outstanding achievement in detail and accuracy, covering secular learning, religion and rituals and ethnography. In other words, Abul Fazl was looking into much beyond a parallel co-existence of cultures or to a composite traditional Indian culture, a mere synthesis of tradition.

One important feature of Abul Fazl's work is that his treatment of Akbar as the *insane-i-kamil* (perfect man) doesn't prevent him from painting out the Emperor's oversights and errors. He is able to do this by first describing these mistakes and then dismissing them as deliberate acts of omission and commission on the part of emperor. Through this device, he is able to criticize Akbar whenever the need arises.

As pointed out earlier the most remarkable aspect of his work is its abundance of statistics. He provides us with statistics of all kinds- wages, the imperial expenditure, revenue rates, Cost of minting, allowances for animals, measured areas and revenue (jama) down to the sub-district level. Moreland has rightly pointed out that these statistics form the baseline for the study of Modern Indian Economic History. In that sense *Ain* is the first important statistical compilation of India.<sup>11</sup>

AbulFazl worked on *Akbarnama* for seven long years, day and night, assisted by a secretarial whoanalyzed, indexed and arranged the data for him. “Many a dark nights passed into mornings and many a long day grew to eve”, remarks Abul Fazl about the odious labor he had to put in this work.<sup>12</sup>

To sum up AbulFazl, we can say that taking general conception of history, AbulFazl came to a new and broader view of Indian history inspired as much by his rationalist liberal attitude as by his new master's new conception of the Mughal Empire. He employed a rational approach to history. He makes no reference to the generally accepted view of Muslim historians that history only served to enlighten and warn believers. He widened the scope of that history as no Muslim historian had done by including an *Ain* and an elaborate sympathetic and careful study of customs and practices of the Hindus. After Al Beruni, it was Abul Fazl who made a systematic attempt to understand Hindu religion and society in proper perspective.



Illustrations from Akbarnama

Nonetheless, the first among Abul Fazl's serious limitation as a historian is his subjectivity, which expressed itself as an object partiality for his patron. All reason, moderation and restraint left him in defending and extolling Akbar, who was always right because he could never err. Credulity and flattery must be reckoned the second great defect of the *Akbarnama*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 110-111, Nizami, p. 230

<sup>11</sup> Moosvi, p.7

<sup>12</sup> Nizami, p. 149; Mukhia, p. 43



### Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni

Badauni regretted having been born at all, but consoled himself that the unfortunate incident took place during the reign of Sher Shah whom he describes as, 'destroyer of the infidels', epithet which in fact was unjust to the great Afghan sovereign. AbulQadir was born in August 1540 at Todah, brought up at Bhusawar, while Badauni seems to have been his parental home. He studied first under ShaikhHatimSambhali and later under the famous Sheikh Mubarak along with Faizi and AbulFazl. Faizi testifies to Badauni's vast and varied learning. The historian mentions his second marriage (1567), but not the first. In 1574 Badauni was presented to Akbar at Agra. It was feeling uneasy about the pretentious dominance of the *Ulama*. "As learning was merchandise much in demand", says Badaun, "I had the privilege of being addressed (by his Majesty) as soon as I reached his presence." The intrepid scholar easily challenged the spurious profundity of the *ulama* and Akbar was pleased. Badauni was appointed Imam (Priest) for prayers on account of his sweet voice and was given thousand *bighas* of land a goodly gift.<sup>13</sup>

To sheikh Mubarak's learning Badauni owed a considerable debt which he acknowledges ungrudgingly. Although later on he accuses the Sheikh of vacillation in his fidelity to the creed, and of moulding his opinion to the needs of different circumstances, he never challenges Sheikh Mubarak's abilities as a scholar. In the scattered references to the events of his life, Badauni leaves the impression that he was eager to converse with the most prominent theologians and scholars of his and gather knowledge from them. Badauni does not mention any source of his income except his service first with Hussain khan for his orthodoxy. For nine years, Badauni had enjoyed the patronage of Hussain Khan, which had given him material stability but had also made him intellectual inert. Badauni reached Agra where he was introduced to the emperor by KhanQurchi- a Mansabdar of 500 and Akbar's personal friend and Hakim AinulMulk, a court physician. Jalal khan recommended him to Akbar with the words, "I have discovered an imam for your majesty whom you will be pleased with." Akbar at this time was engaged in his struggle against the supremacy of the *ulema*. It is these victories which later on become the cause of his disgrace. He considers Makhudum ul mulk extremely bigoted. For Shaikh Abdun Nabi, he has many nasty words to spare. Shais and Hindus- Heretics and infidels, of course he could not evenbarely tolerate. And certainly, he was no partisan of the liberalism of Sheikh Mubarak and his gang. "He attacked everything without suggesting an alternative anywhere, whereas Akbar sought to rebuild an institutional framework within which the ulema would be subject to his command. It was too late when Badauni realized this." In a way it was Badauni's negative Independence from all fixed opinions that helped him retain at least his source of income though in a remote corner he felt intellectually and emotionally frustrated.<sup>14</sup>

Badauni, in fact views himself in relation to the steep rise of AbulFazl in Akbar's favor and his consequent material advance. AbulFazl had, within a short period of time, followed Badauni to the court. Therefore on account of AbulFazl's diligence, genuineness and manoeuvring he attained the *mansab* of 2000, on the other hand our up to the time Badauni was writing his *Munthkhab*, our author due to his innocence and inexperience remained stuck at the initial rank 20. It pained Badauni to reflect that the one man who had no merit of his own, who had passed off his father's writings as his own and who was essentially dishonest even in his loyalty to Akbar, held an office a hundred times a superior to Badauni's own. It is significant that Badauni complains against his material circumstances immediately following such reflections. It is therefore perhaps more out of his own poverty.<sup>15</sup>

By 1578-79, the situation at the court had altered too radically for Badauni's liking. By signing *Mahzar* which made Akbar practically the arbiter in theological and juridical disputes. Thus in utter words of Badauni, "I didn't consider myself a fit recipient of his Majesty's favor, nor his Majesty worthy of my services....". Badauni's flight may have been voluntary. At the same time the Mulla in Abdul Qadir was of no more use to the emperor either. Yet Badauni could not give the imperial service for reasons of sheer

<sup>12</sup> Moosvi, p.7

<sup>13</sup> Nizami, p. 149; Mukhia, p. 43

<sup>14</sup> Mukhia, pp. 54-55, Sreedharan 360

<sup>15</sup> Mukhia, pp. 150-151; Sreedharan, p. 363

sheer subsistence. Nor did Akbar throw him out. There was another branch of intellectual activity in which he could prove his worth- Translation. It was this place where he gives vent to his wrath in secrecy- *The Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*. From now onwards, Badauni begins to view everything with contempt and bitterness and expresses himself in a language at times verging on obscenity between the compulsion of service and the desire to escape, Badauni found a via media; He began frequently to absent himself from the court and finally of repeating this offence of overstaying his leave in 1591-92 infuriated Akbar beyond repair. The first work our author undertook at Akbar's command was a Persian translation of the *Singhasan Battisi* (collection of 32 stories). The *Kitab-ul-Ahadis* was the first original work that Badauni had actually completed, followed by Persian translation of history of Kashmir, then he also translated part of *Muajam-ul-Buldan*, a geographical dictionary, from Arabic to Persian. He also wrote *Najat-ul-Rashid*. Badauni informs us he received the stimulus for writing the *Munthakhab* from his Re-translation of the history of Kashmir. This he did in 1591. Therefore it would have taken him nearly 5 years to complete his book, which he finished in 1595-96.<sup>16</sup>

Badauni's *Munthakhab-ut-Tawarikh* is literary history written in secrecy. It is significant that he does not begin the book with the Muslim conquest of Sind but he started with Subuktgin (son of Mahmud Ghazni). One could, perhaps, expect that the first volume of *Munthakhab*, dealing with history from Subuktgin to Humayun. In other words, vol.1 of his book was political history. The vol.2 of his book marks a clear distinction from the first in form, substance and treatment. It comprises the events of the 40 years of Akbar's reign set in the form of an annual chronicle. He deals Akbar's administrative organization like *karori* system. An interesting feature of the book is the interviewing of biographical notes with the narrative of events. In other words, He wrote his book as an alternative to the contemporary historians. The 3<sup>rd</sup> volume is in form of a *Tazkira*. In this volume, Badauni writes short biographical sketches of the *Mashaikh* and the *ulama's* of Akbar's age and the physician and the poets of Akbar's court. Thus Badauni's main object in writing the *Munthakhab* was to record his reactions to the events of Akbar's reign and the persons involved in his court. Therefore Badauni depends more on his personal testimony than on any documentary research.<sup>17</sup>

However, for an objective assessment of Badauni's own personality, basic patterns of his thought and his contribution, it is necessary that our analysis of his views and attitudes be not confined to *Munthakhab-ut-Tawarikh* alone but his other works should be also taken into consideration. Besides the *Munthakhab-ut-Tawarikh* and translations of a number of Sanskrit and Arabic books, he has left behind another book i.e., *Najat Rashid*-a voluminous work with a text running into 531 pages. Unfortunately, this book has not received the attention from the historians and scholars it deserves. It is imperative to objectively analyse this book and try to find answers to questions about its social milieu. This will give a more balanced picture of one of the most controversial writers of medieval India.

Peter Hardy describes it as 'a work on Sufism, ethics and Mahdavi movement of Badauni's days'. S.A.A. Rizvi defines it as a theological mystical work, but elsewhere says that 'the *Munthakhab-ut-Tawarikh* is meant to destroy the faith of the sunnis in Akbar; the *Najat Rashid* seeks to reiterate the principles on which orthodox sunnism can be revived; thus each work complements the other. The *Najat Rashid* was compiled in 1591 during a short duration of time. This book contains the reference to *Muntakhab ut Tawarikh*, which may suggest that the latter was complete by the time the former was being compiled or at least. It was being compiled simultaneously. Besides introductory and concluding sections, the book consists of seven chapters. The introductory section contains the importance and imperative need of repentance. This followed by a discussion on the nature and definition of sin, mortal and venial. The first chapter deals with seventeen mortal sins (*kabair*). The list of mortal sins is headed by polytheism (*shirk*). The second chapter deals with forty heinous sins. These were accusing finger towards the practices done at Akbar's court: idol worship, worship of sun, veneration of stars etc. The third chapter also deals with forty sins. The fourth chapter deals with *Huququallah* (obligation due to the almighty). The fifth chapter deals with those offences

<sup>16</sup> Mukhia, pp. 91-93

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 94-95

which are considered to be inconsistent with civil behavior (*muraut*), and propriety of conduct (*adab*).the sixth chapter covers miscellaneous offences and these are also number forty. The seventh and last chapter also consists of forty offences, termed by the author *taqsirat* (failings, guilt). The concluding section discusses the method of repentance.

It is clear from this brief survey of the contents that this book is basically a theological treatise and deals with the sins, crimes and offences that Islam forbids. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the book is a scathing indictment of Akbar's religious policies, albeit in an entirely indirect manner.

To sum up our author, circumstances divided Badauni's personality. Ideologically he disagreed with the situations he was placed in. He had to praise all through what his heart wanted him to condemn. So long as Religion and politics move separately, Badauni has all respect and admiration for Akbar, but the moment Akbar interfering in religious matters, Badauni takes up his cudgels against him. In other words, it acts as a corrective panegyrics of AbulFazl.

### Khwaja Nizam-ud-din Ahmad

It is unfortunate that for reconstruction of Nizamuddin Ahmad's life we have to depend on extremely scanty detail. There is no direct evidence for the date or the year of Nizamuddin Ahmad's birth. We are however told by his inmate friend Badauni that at the time of his death, 28 October 1594, he was forty five of age, that place his birth in 1549. Almost nothing is known about Nizamuddin's early youth and education. We have only Dowson's statement that he was a pupil of Mulla Ali Sher, a learned man and father of Faizi Sirhindi, author of *Akbarnama*. He belonged to a family with a long record of service under the Mughals. His father Khawaja Muqim Harawi, served under Babur as the Diwan-i-Bayatut. Nizamuddin himself appears to have joined Akbar's service early in his life, though the date and circumstances of his formally joining it are not known, however, he gradually rose to the important post of the Bakshi of the empire in his early forties. Nizamuddin first formal appointment came in the twenty ninth regnal year as the *bakshi* of the province of Gujarat. In Gujarat Nizamuddin proved his work as a soldier. In 1587 when Abdur Rahim was recalled to the court, the charge of Gujarat was assigned to him with Azd-ud-Daula and Qulij khan. For his service in Gujarat our author was honoured by the emperor with the award of a horse, a robe and enhancement of salary. Towards the end of 1591 he was favoured with grant of the *pargana* of Shamshabad as his jagir. It was in 37 regnal year, 1592, the Nizamuddin reached the pinnacle of his career, when he was nominated to replace Asaf Khan in the post of Bakshi of the emperor. As Bakshi, he accompanied the emperor to Kashmir soon afterwards.<sup>18</sup>

At Akbar's court, during a period of hectic controversies of various natures, Nizamuddin appears to have remained a largely non-controversial figure. He may have been deeply religious in his personal life, but this didn't color either his career or his historical work. His interest in history had developed at a young age. He had been initiated into his branch by his father. In the writing of the *Tabaqat*, he was assisted by Mir Masom Bukhari who was a poet and a historian and sheikh Mohd. Ishaq Tagai. This necessity was a necessary on account of the scarcity of time which his office forced on him. To the task of compiling the *Tarikh-i-Alfi*, what precise contribution he made to his work, it is difficult to ascertain. There is one more work, *Tarikh-i-Elach* ascribed to him by Sarup Chand, author of *Sahih-ul-Akbar*, however, there is no supporting evidence among our present sources and if it was written by him, it has been lost to us.<sup>19</sup>

The *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* comprises its author's account of his history of nine regions, each designed by him as a separate *Tabqa*. The regions are Delhi, Deccan, Gujarat, Multan, Bengal, Malwa, Jaunpur, Sind, Kashmir .the books ends with the conclusion in which the length and breadth of Akbar's empire have been described. The conclusion also tells us that there were 3200 towns, in the empire of which 120 were great cities. Within this regional framework, he describes dynastic history. He writes dynastic history each of these regions to

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 242

<sup>19</sup> Mukhia, p. 109-110

the time of its conquest by Akbar. Within a dynastic history each region is a separate unit. The breakup of Akbar's reign thus meticulously maintains the chronological order of events. The account of each region opens with the enthronement of the ruler and closes with the end of the reign. It is very rare that he gives biographical sketch of a ruler except Illtumish and Sher Shah. The content of the work comprises information of accession of rulers to the throne, their wars, and rebellions of the Nobles etc. But other aspects of political history like politics and administrative measures find no mention. At times author gives extra phenomenon information like the occurrence of earth quakes. It's towards the end of his work that he gives information about the length and breadth of Akbar's empire, its revenue, number of towns etc..<sup>20</sup>

For writing his *Tabaqat*, Nizamuddin appears to have utilized sources which he mentions at the outset in his work. This list consists of twenty eight works, *Taj-ul-Maasir*, *Tughlaqnama* etc. He also refers to the *Akbarnama* of Abulfazl. However author appears merely to copy his sources in the process but summarizing them.

To conclude, the work was treated as a standard history and subsequent writers freely borrowed from it. His conception of writing regional history forms a single great contribution to the form of history writing in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The purpose of writing his *tabaqat* was therefore to fill this lacuna and write a compendious history of whole Hindustan. It would appear that its narrative style and absence of value judgment in it have been construed to be its stronger points, for provided a stable prototype, for writing political history. Thus his conception of writing regional history is great contribution to the historiography of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### Conclusion

A significant fact regarding the historians we have just reviewed is that they were all either courtiers or aspirant to such position. The common elements in their approach as well as their difference arose in consequence of the position they occupied. As members of the ruling class at some level or the other, they were not indifferent to the conditions of the common people e.g. they all denounce *zamindari* class because it created many tensions for them. Also to AbulFazl, the reign of Akbar is the most glorious period in human history, Baduni considers it to dismal age in their detail. However from the reign of Akbar, there is a pattern of development in some elements of history writing, particularly in the content and the attitude of historians to their source of information.<sup>21</sup>

While generally, the focal point of the historians remains the court, nonetheless, history writing under the Akbar's period marked a change in Form, Content, and spirit. One great change an advance made by Mughal Historiography was to free itself from religious, theological shackles. Abul Fazl refused to regard history as allied to religion and theology and he tried to link it with philosophy. To cut the story short, we can say no period of Indian history can match with the reign of Akbar so far as the production of Historical literature goes. Akbar's own interest in history went a long way in inspiring others to undertake compilation of Historical works.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 113-114; Sreedharan, p. 360

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 163



# Book Reviews

**D.N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*, Naavayana Publishing, 2009, 183 pages, INR 240.**

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In the light of the current political fervour, where much of the Politics is centered around the 'holy' cow and its protection from the alleged Muslim beef eaters, the memory takes one back to the year 2001 when D.N.Jha wrote his seminal work titled as 'The Myth of the Holy Cow', in which the author has tried to look into the sanctity and sacredness of this particular animal in the ancient India.

This book was first published abroad by Verso(London) in the year 2001 as the right wing politicians and religious fanatics were successful in getting a court order restraining the circulation of this book . However in year 2009, the second edition of this book was published by Navayana Publishing. This edition included as an appendix, an extract from B.R.Ambedkar's work, wherein Ambedkar has discussed how beef eating came to be associated with untouchability.

While the cow veneration and vegetarianism maybe the hallmarks of Hinduism today, Jha, gives us the evidence that this has hardly been always the case. Citing sources ranging from the ancient scriptures the Vedas(C.1000 BC), to Sanskrit epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata (200BC-AD200), and also Buddhist and Jaina religious scriptures as well as archeological material dispersed widely over time and space attest to the practice of ritual killings of cattles including the cow. The author through these evidence "argues the 'holiness' of the cow as a myth and its flesh was very part of early Indian non-vegetarian food regimen and dietary traditions." After reading this work it would be wrong to conclude that the practice of beef eating was first introduced in India by the followers of Islam who came from outside as has been suggested by some right wing politicians and religious fanatics.

"The sacrifice of the horse or the cow, the *asvamedha* or the *gomedha*, appears to have been common in the earliest periods of the Hindu rituals."

The evidence drawn from the Buddhist text unambiguously shows that eating animal flesh including beef was prevalent during the age of Buddha. The killing of animal for rituals as well as for food was very common in his times.

"Even the law book of Manu(200BC-AD200) provides a list of lawful and forbidden food in which only the flesh of Camel is prohibited, not of the Cow."

Thus it appears that the cow was neither sacred nor unslayable in the Vedic period, evidence shows that vegetarianism, in fact, coexisted with the non-vegetarianism. It was only after when sedentary lifestyle was adopted by the people where agriculture was practiced that a prohibition on cattle slaughter was brought about but the memory of eating flesh and sacrificial killings of the cattles were very well preserved in the medieval period.

The only lacuna in this work is that the author has not discussed question of how and when the cow became 'holy' at length as he discusses the myth itself. Other than that this work is a straight up academic survey with a slightly provocative title perhaps to arouse the interest of the readers.

The whole work is divided into not so lengthy six chapters, along with an Introduction the author also includes as an appendix an extract from B.R.Ambedkar's work. Apart from 24pages long Bibliography, the author gives at the end of each chapter a long list of notes, citations and references.

**Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth*, Penguin Random House India, 2017, 189 pages, INR 399.**

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It is true that Aurangzeb has been one of the controversial figures of Indian history, as Audrey Truschke also points out, and has attracted attention of historians since the colonial times when history writing in India started. Audrey Truschke's *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth* is a book that attempts to wash-off the black spots from the image of this man, Aurangzeb. The central theme of the book is suggested by the title itself and the author maintained her proposed agenda of proving the sixth Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, a man who was not a bigot but a man of contradictions and complexities. Instead of giving footnotes, Truschke opted for providing Bibliographical Essay and the Notes for the ease of reading. There is also given illustrations of various events of Aurangzeb's reign at the end of the last chapter. The simple and easy language of the book makes it easier to understand, but Truschke's viewpoints remain questionable at certain places, so as to be accepted at face value. Audrey Truschke's approach, however, contains flaw in itself. She has written this book essentially keeping in mind the present public opinion of Aurangzeb, thus, framing her opinion for a particular purpose and leaving aside scientific approach towards history writing. Truschke adopts apologetic attitude towards Aurangzeb which makes her work appear as 'secularisation of history'. Then, the repetition of the arguments throughout the book makes it uninteresting and at times annoying. She has also generalised the historiography of Indian subcontinent over Aurangzeb, as an outcome of conflicting and biased ideology due to past and present politics. According to her, in Pakistan Aurangzeb is seen as a better monarch among others, and in India 'Aurangzeb typifies zealous Muslims overall both past and present who allegedly threaten Indian society by virtue of their religiosity.' Arguably, Indian society is being less threatened by the dead Timurid emperor Aurangzeb but more by those who are ignorant of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic history and society of India. In the concluding pages of her work, Truschke says that 'for India, such ideas (relating to present notion about Aurangzeb) mean that Muslims cannot be fully Indian...' But this is a very narrow understanding of the socio political condition of India. The outcry of a few people or political party does not make any community unnationalistic. Hence, the work seems to be an outcome of improper homework. The early twentieth century historiography on Aurangzeb that Truschke condemns is not wrong and she herself observes at one place that it was the British divide and rule policy that induced such biases. But then it will also be inappropriate to suggest that Aurangzeb's divergence from the ideas and views of his ancestors was always his last option to resort to.

Nevertheless, some of the arguments are striking. In the elephant fight that took place shortly after Dara Shukoh's wedding, Truschke traces the vigorousness of Aurangzeb in contemporary sources and illustrations and points out that Dara was nowhere in the scene but lurked in the background. But her insistence that Shah Jahan kept himself calm and quiet due to the reason that during his own princely days the same kind of fight was undertaken by him, while his father and emperor Jahangir kept quiet, seems less acceptable. It can be contested by the relation between the king and the prince in the two different period of time. Khurram (Shah Jahan) was favourite most son of Jahangir and was a clear heir apparent, while at this time, it was not Aurangzeb but Dara who was the clear favourite and future heir apparent. Then, besides a few lapses, the justification for the strict administration and justice at every place in the book rests perfectly at its place. Truschke points out that Aurangzeb's justice was not showy but meant for effective administration. Furthermore, she rightly argues that the modern nickname, 'the poor man's Taj', of Bibi Ka Maqbara, built by Aurangzeb for his first wife Dilras Banu Begum, who died in 1657, hardly does justice to Aurangzeb's vision of honouring his wife with a classic Mughal tomb. Basing her argument on that of Katherine Butler Schofield, Truschke remarks that authors produced more Indian-Persian treatises on music than in the prior 500 years of Indian History. She says that Aurangzeb limited only certain types of music within his court (though, she does not mention them). Similarly, while dealing with temple destruction, though she argues that all demolishment was non religious but political in nature, yet accepts that the command was an abrupt departure from earlier Mughal policy that suggests the complexity and the limits of Aurangzeb's protection of Hindu temples. She rationally states that the 'generations of Mughal

kings had attempted to curb certain religious behaviours, especially those of errant Brahmins who, in Mughal eyes, took advantage of the less sophisticated. For example, Akbar took Brahmins to task for misrepresenting Hindu texts to lower castes and hoped that translating Sanskrit texts into Persian would prompt these (in his opinion) arrogant leaders to reform their ways.' However, in a letter cited by Truschke, Aurangzeb has asked his grandson Bidar Bakht to continue the practice of weighing of entire body against gold, silver etc. because it benefits needy and poor people (he had himself abandoned it, the reason being economic depletion of empire that Truschke did not give). Also, while dealing with the final years of Aurangzeb, Truschke, besides trying to ease the burden of decline from Aurangzeb's shoulder up to a little extent, correctly points out that 'Aurangzeb did not recognize that he bore the brunt of responsibility for his sons being ill-prepared to ascend the Mughal throne' and 'by the 1700s Aurangzeb favoured his grandsons over his sons, which further weakened the positions of the latter'.

Unfortunately, the author has failed to connect the adverse effects of agrarian and economic crisis of the empire, as suggested by Francois Bernier and Abul Fazl Mamuri among others, with the 'life and reign of the emperor' that the author undertook to reconstruct. Truschke also omits many facts that could have challenged her argument, like charge of heresy over Dara Shukoh to justify his execution by Aurangzeb. She even tries to see things in a singular perspective. While dealing with Bijapur and Golconda, she could comprehend that why Shivaji allied with these states but failed to point out that these states also supported Marathas secretly, as they saw their survival attached to the survival of Marathas. She completely ignores the Shia factor of Golconda decried by Aurangzeb before conquering it, though it was just a war-cry and nothing more. In Aurangzeb's dealing with Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur, the author rejects any possibility of religious animosity due to forceful religious conversion of non-Muslims by Mughal officers in Kashmir and argues that the guru was executed for taking up arms against the Mughal state. But Truschke does not mention any cause of taking up of the arms while she rejects the religious cause. Shaikh Farid Bhakkari in *Zakhirat-al Khawanin* has mentioned that the availability of gun and gunpowder had become very common by this time. So, the execution of the guru does not seem to be an outcome of sudden knowledge of arms with him that attracted immediate attention of the emperor.

While discussing the temple destruction the argument, that there were also the issuance of grants to the temples and Brahmins does not justify the incompetency in maintaining the spirit of Mughal tradition. Truschke, though, rightly points out that there was no such order as general destruction of temples but 'a few dozen is a more likely number,' and that 'in Aurangzeb's eyes Islamic teachings and the Mughal tradition enjoined him to protect Hindu temples, pilgrimage destinations, and holy men.' She is equally comprehensible in 'the idea that religious institutions could be subject to politically motivated destructions makes many modern people see red, but premodern Indians did not draw such a firm line between religion and politics.' A considerable emphasis has been put on the justice of Aurangzeb which seems to be true but then putting the argument that 'for Aurangzeb, protecting and, at times, razing temples served the cause of ensuring justice for all throughout the Mughal Empire' puts before us the question: Is demolition of temple justice? Instead, it was less a justice but more a safety guard against the future offenders. The argument that Aurangzeb did not destroy temples in Deccan, where he spent last three decades of his life is correct, but no possible explanation has been provided for it, rather than proving him secular. The author failed to notice that Aurangzeb conquered forts but failed to win over the masses in Deccan and for this purpose he had abandoned his earlier ways of 'justice.' Moreover, it is quiet arguable to accept that Delhi became a 'ghost town' when Aurangzeb had moved to Deccan.

Attitude of Aurangzeb towards Hindus has also been much debated among historians and Truschke sought to choose her own side. Audrey Truschke gives us the vision which is framed from only one set of ideas, thereby, making the book a work of history from above. Though, she rightly points out that Aurangzeb appointed Hindus to top positions in his government, yet she could not give proper insight into it. Aurangzeb gave high posts and mansabs to all, irrespective of religion, because initially it was his own position which was untenable due to presence of Shah Jahan. So, to prove himself as an effective ruler and Shah Jahan an obsolete, Aurangzeb could not antagonise the nobility, including those who stood at the side of Dara Shukoh during the war of succession. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Raja Raghunath was made the Dewan, whose worth was high in the eyes of emperor, evident from the letters of Aurangzeb, cited by

the author. She gives the clear understanding that "Hindus" of the day often did not even label themselves as such and rather prioritized a medley of regional, sectarian, and caste identities.' She rightly comprehends that in 1659 Aurangzeb ordered for the maintenance of rights and practices of Brahmins, but failed to connect it with the presence of Shuja in the eastern region, who was also the claimant to the throne. She observes that there took place abandoning of Mughal practices, based on Hindu traditions, like jharokha darshan, public weighing of emperor against gold and silver on his birthday, prohibition on astrologers, among others. At one place, she correctly marks out that Aurangzeb wanted to consolidate Muslim support, but she failed to notice that in the long run an implicit message was being sent that the emperor was invoking sharia't. She then fails to cite some of the discriminatory measures of Aurangzeb, like half of what Hindu merchants paid were required to be paid by Muslim merchants, after the sack of Surat in 1664 by Shivaji; restraints in giving promotions to Rajputs; imposition of jaziya in 1679, and so forth. So far as jaziya is concerned, she marks it out as a casual remark and does not give proper judgement over it and sides it with the argument that the emperor placated Ulamas by making them jaziya tax collectors. The argument that it was to prove the Islamic sanctity of the empire is also not justified for Mughal Empire. Since, jaziya was imposed only over non-Muslim commoners among whom Brahmins and Rajputs were exempted, and amount imposed used to be very less, the imposition of jaziya had no proper reason. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that it was a kind of discriminatory and humiliating tax. One of the orders of 1672, recalling all endowed lands given to Hindus and reserving all such future land grants for Muslims, though was not strictly followed, yet it does not disapprove the fact that Aurangzeb had anticipated it, thus making the dent in the life and reign of Aurangzeb that Truschke refused to accept. One of the most striking errors that Truschke made was by calling Rathore rebellion of 1679 as a rebellion against Mughals (rather than Inder Singh) that revived after thirty years. Many historians see Rathore rebellion as an opposition to the incursion of Marwar into *khalisa* by Aurangzeb, after the death of Rathore chieftain of Marwar, Jaswant Singh. But M. Athar Ali in his article 'Relations with Marwar and Mewar: The Rathore Rebellion of 1679' successfully proves that the Rathores rebelled not against the Mughals but Inder Singh, after Aurangzeb appointed him as the head of Marwar state. (Inder Singh was elder brother of Jaswant Singh, who was to become the Maharana but Jaswant Singh usurped his powers). Moreover, the fact that the Rathores asked Mughal qiladar to vacate the region before rebellion clearly suggests that whatever it may be but not a rebellion against Mughal suzerainty. Furthermore, when Rathores and Sisodias came under Prince Akbar's command, it was not their rebellion but Prince Akbar's revolt against the Emperor Aurangzeb.

It was not that Aurangzeb was a communal person but a person who evoked religion to get support for his cause. He failed to understand the diversity of his empire vis-à-vis religion. So, though, the emperor might have not been discriminatory or partial by heart or mind, yet how can one say that the masses of the empire comprehended these measures with equal impartiality?

Possibly, she is correct in claiming that 'he (Aurangzeb) wanted to be a just king, a good Muslim, and a sustainer of Mughal culture and customs,' nevertheless, it will be nothing but a hypothesis to suggest or claim what Aurangzeb actually anticipated of himself or anything. True, in reality both Akbar and Dara Shukoh were equally complicated as Aurangzeb and if Aurangzeb reign would be shorter by thirty years, we might have a totally different image of him. But it is what it is.

Lastly, Truschke rightly observes that 'Aurangzeb was an emperor devoted to power, his vision of justice, and expansion. He was an administrator with streaks of brilliance and scores of faults. He grew the Mughal Empire to its greatest extent and may also have positioned it to break apart.' Nevertheless, her argument that 'many who condemn Aurangzeb have no training in the discipline of history and lack even basic skills in reading pre-modern Persian' is so absolute in the sense of appraising Aurangzeb that she seems nothing less than an apologist of the theme which she chose to work upon. She has provided us a message with her book that a historian or an individual should not look at the any period of history by being preoccupied with the notion of communal bias. Her attempt has put before us the picture of Aurangzeb as a man he might have been in reality, rather than what is held conventionally. It is a work that is meant for all to comprehend that Aurangzeb was just as simple a man of thoughts as his ancestors were.



**Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth*, Penguin Random House India, 2017, 189 pages, INR 399.**

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Historian Audrey Truschke is assistant professor of south Asia history at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. Her first book *Culture of encounters: Sanskrit at Mughal court* (p.2016), documents the fascinating exchange between the Persian speaking Islamic elite of Mughal empire and traditional Sanskrit scholars from 1560-1650.

*I am what time, circumstances, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am, also, much more than that. So are we all.*

--James Baldwin, American writer, 1955.

Audrey Truschke's recent work *Aurangzeb: The Man And The Myth*, is an short biography of the sixth Mughal ruler Abu'l Muzaffar Muhiuddin Muhammad (November 1618-March 1707), commonly known as Aurangzeb or by his regnal title '*Alamgir*' (seizure of the world).

Looking at the socio-cultural climate of India, where history had burst out into modern day politics, Audrey Truschke's work is admissible and should be more than welcomed. To choose to write the biography of a man who is the most controversial figure of the Indian history is in itself a challenge for any historian. And the author herself calls Aurangzeb an '*Enigma*', who is enough complex to be a "challenging historical subject".

By the display of the attacked personality of the emperor Aurangzeb, the author totally approves *E.H Carr's* definition of history, i.e '*History as an unending dialogue between the past and the present*'.

Sincere efforts have been made by the author to defend Aurangzeb on several grounds. And more or less she is successful in doing so. She mentions various incidents in which political, religious and Hindu nationalist groups had tried to revile Aurangzeb. Be it renaming the Aurangzeb road in New Delhi to APJ Abdul Kalam road, or calling the people of a section of society as '*Aurangzeb ki aulad*' (Aurangzeb's progeny) and '*Babur ki aulad*' (Babur's progeny).

Unfortunately, history has become what modernity wants to read. Today, Aurangzeb is considered as Hindu hater, murderer and a religious bigot. Hence, the author indulges into cleaning the stains from the personality of emperor to some extent. Aurangzeb is accused of destroying thousands of temples. She argues by referring Richard Eaton, that only a few dozen temples were actually destroyed. Emperor is even blamed to be a reason of the partition of the country by a Pakistani playwright, Shahid Nadeem.

The defence of Aurangzeb could have been done in two ways:

✍ The one which most of the cross border thinkers do, i.e praising Aurangzeb by criticising Akbar's liberal policies.

✍ The one done by Audrey Truschke herself i.e presenting the unbiased facts and figures and basing all her arguments on relevant historical sources.

She argues that Aurangzeb cannot be reduced to his faith and cannot be termed as an orthodox Muslim. As which orthodox Muslim imprisons his father or fights with his brothers for throne? Aurangzeb's vision of justice was deeply coloured by wider Islamic tradition, much of which had little to do with theology.

This work provides a sweeping overview of some prominent aspects of Aurangzeb and his reign. Aurangzeb is a lot more complex than the modern day simplistic portrait of him, and the author had done good job of showing it.

A lay reader can read this book at one go, unlike most of the historical texts. The title of the book is very

alluring, letting the reader to choose between Aurangzeb as a *man*, acting as per his time or Aurangzeb as an *myth*, created by today's Indian nationalists and hi(story) writers. If one has to make up a decision between the two, then he/she has to unlearn all that was taught in the school about the emperor.

Not only modern day critics, she also mentions *Jawarharlal Nehru*, *Jadunath Sarkar* and *Alexander Dow*, who thought of Aurangzeb as the one who exemplified the extreme despotism driven by religious fanaticism.

*The last of the so-called 'Grand mughals', Aurangzeb, tried to put back the clock, and in this attempt  
stopped it and broke it up  
--Jawarharlal Nehru*

Undoubtedly, she is moved by the current flowing false perceptions about Aurangzeb, and that people are accepting and giving importance to them. Thus, she had made a bold effort to distinct history from popular perception.

But when one reads the book, it turns out that like a linear person she is backing Aurangzeb too much. The aim behind writing this book is doubted. Did she want to write a comprehensive biography? Or did she want to provide a counter to the present day allegations made on Aurangzeb? Although, at a point she says, '*of course, noone could contend that Aurangzeb was without faults.*'

Next, what she misses to provide, is a much more in-depth discussion on the emperor. And a biography deserves depth. She does not go in details of the revolts under Aurangzeb. She mentions them and passes through them. But if we see the positive side of it, then she does not make it an exhaustive study. A person not related to the subject history can also easily go through it.

We also miss the tabular representation of facts and figures as found in the works of M.Athar Ali. The four pages with six beautiful figures related to Aurangzeb are attractive part of the book. The book actually starts with the list of figures. The language of the book is simple with no difficult explanations. It looks like; the author is having a conversation with her readers. Contents are topically arranged. The attractive parts are the quotes from different sources at the starting of each chapter. There are no footnotes but only end notes. She has given reason in her preface for not providing footnotes i.e. she wanted to make it easy at reading and for the sake of narrative flow, she has not provided footnotes. Abbreviations are given in the notes .And at the end of the book; there is an index of six pages.

Overall, the book which is of the size of a monograph hits the minds of the people and makes them think about the veracity of the common perceptions regarding Aurangzeb. Author asks to see Aurangzeb as per the norms of his age not ours. One cannot accuse Aurangzeb for using religion, as most of the Mughal rulers including Akbar used religion for their political motives. And if Aurangzeb was an anti-religious despot then, what we will be calling Machiavelli and Gandhi's political instincts? Gandhi may be accused for several other things, but not for his use of religion to attract masses in the freedom struggle.

Aurangzeb is the man of contradictions. At one hand he destroyed temples but on the other hand, author provides evidences of Aurangzeb issuing orders for protecting temples and providing land grants and stipends to Brahmins. He restricted the celebration of Holi but also clamped down on Muharram and Eid festivities. It would be correct to say that no path to the past can begin anywhere but in the present but, the present day norms cannot be implemented to judge the past. Audrey Truschke has shown by her work that the current visions of Aurangzeb are more fiction than reality, and the allegations against Aurangzeb are not supported by historical evidences.

**Aslam Parvez, *The Life and Poetry of Bahadur Shah Zafar*, English translation by Ather Farouqi. Hay House India. Delhi, 2017. Pages 240, price INR 599/-**

-Dr. Mohammad Sajjad  
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This significant book has a 'prehistory'. In 1964-65, it was a Ph. D. thesis in Urdu literature, with improvements, it was finally published in 1986, and its latest edition came out in 2013. Quite a lot of works on the history of the uprising of 1857 benefitted from this well-researched book based marvellously on lots of primary sources including the 'Mutiny Papers' and 'Foreign Department Records' in the National Archives of India (NAI), and also drawing upon the newspapers of nineteenth century Delhi. Besides, the Urdu accounts, diaries, and memoirs which came up in the early decades of twentieth century, have been used quite extensively. That a student pursuing Ph. D. in Urdu literature will take the pains of looking into all such primary archival sources and other un(der)used sources, is something quite inspiring for the research students of both History and Urdu literature. It is certainly unusual in the academies of our times where laziness in researches is increasingly becoming a norm. Sad indeed!

Thus, in terms of historiographical rigour, this book is quite valuable for the history of nineteenth century Delhi. Small wonder then that almost every significant work on the uprising of 1857, in recent times, including the bestsellers like that of William Dalrymple (2006), *The Last Mughal: Fall of a Dynasty*, Delhi, 1857, has not been able to ignore the pioneering work of Aslam Parvez. It is therefore heartening that its English rendering has now become available. The award winning translator, Dr. Ather Farouqi deserves accolades for doing a wonderful job. The English translation is as much faithful with the original Urdu text as possible. Quite lucid and a racy read!

The book is divided into three parts, comprising a total of 19 small chapters. It is as much a biographical work as an evaluation of Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775-1862) as an accomplished Urdu poet. The Chapter 17 evaluates the 'Character and Personality' of the emperor poet. This assessment brings out a very favourable description about the abilities and conduct of the otherwise misunderstood ruler. Illustrating with a number of primary as well as secondary works, he showers many laurels upon the capabilities of Bahadur Shah Zafar. That he was vanquished quite miserably by the ascendant and well equipped British colonial power and that he was no match before the British, should in no way mislead us about the abilities he was endowed with, is perhaps one of the central objectives of the book. This specific purpose of the book comes out very clearly. 'Innocence and simplicity were ingrained in Bahadur Shah Zafar's character and he kept himself aloof from deception and intrigue, believing other to be the same...had an abiding interest in the welfare of the people....particularly careful about religious sensitivities and personally took part in festivities and social get togethers ...put a ban on cow slaughters as a token of regard for Hindu sentiments' (p. 165). He had a good command over many Indian languages including Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi, besides Arabic, and Persian. He was a connoisseur of music, calligraphy, ivory carving and poetry besides accomplishments in swordsmanship, horsemanship and archery. Historian Percival Spear, in a typical Orientalist way observes that the intellectual, scholastic, and innovative emperor, 'could have run his court on the pattern of a philosopher-prince, had he been the ruler of a German province or heading a republic' (p. 166).

Notwithstanding, tremendous economic constraints, he undertook a number of architectural pursuits, such as, Baradari (Hira Mahal), Nehr-e-Bahisht, Mahtab Bagh, a small mosque, the Jal Mahal, a bridge, all inside the Lal Qila, and few such structures outside the Fort. It was not without any reason that the titular emperor was enjoying popularity not only among the common people but also among the men of intellect and learning (p. 111). With the reference of the Ahsan-ul-Akhbar, dated 28 August 1846, the author asserts that 'Zafar was a man of Sufi temperament and his subjects venerated him as a saint, many aspiring to become his disciples' (p. 169).

In a very subtle way, Aslam Parvez, brings out a significant aspect of the nineteenth century India--the colonial power-play. Though this colonial power-play is brought out more poignantly in a fictional

work of Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* (2000), wherein he describes the exile of the King, Thibaw (of the ruling Konbaung dynasty of Burma) to Madras and later to Ratnagiri (Maharashtra), in 1885. More than that, Sudha Shah (2012), in her book, *The King in Exile: The Fall of the Royal family of Burma*, brings it out even more clearly, and a comparative reading of the last days of the last ruler of the two dynasties, viz., the India's Mughals and Burma's Konbaung, would be historically more enriching. This is something, the translator Ather Farouqui should have thought of adding as a prefatory/introductory essay to this volume. Going through its Chapter 12, '1857' (pp. 111-27) makes the reader feel this omission even more strongly. For those interested in the historiography of the uprising of 1857, this chapter is very significant. It has subjected (some of the Indian historians of the pre Independence era) to scrutiny.

Aslam Parvez discusses about the better known poets of Delhi in the era of Bahadur Shah Zafar (pp. 133-144; 153-162), viz., Ghalib (1797-1869), Zauq (1789-1854), Momin (1800-1851); but Dagh (1831-1905) is a conspicuous omission. In fact, except Zauq, hardly any other contemporary accomplished poet has been discussed in detail. For a comprehensive and nuanced details pertaining to literary and cultural aspects, one has to refer to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's well researched novel, *The Mirror of Beauty* (2013), which is an impressive depiction of pre-1857 Indo-Islamic world.

Overall, this piece of meticulous research is quite significant for the students of history inspiring them to delve into archival sources. For the students of Urdu literature, this should be a guide how to do referencing. Sadly, in recent times even better known academicians of Urdu literature have been found publishing their researches with horribly casual referencing.

The author's articulation is coherent, lucid, and corroborated with strong evidences, even while maintaining brevity. This indeed makes a very interesting read.

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## Interview with Prof. Irfan Habib on the theme History and Historiography

**Q: Sir, I would like to begin with a very basic question, When did time become historical and how have we identified it and separated it from ahistorical time? And when did this process start in Indian context?**

**A:** Well, time by definition is historical and by convention, it is divided. By one convention, when the human species evolved (by larger definition not only homo-sapiens, sapiens but also earlier homonids like homo-erectus) when they appeared, in particular they are treated as, in essence, historical time periods. Previous to that is considered geological period. There is a further division between pre-history and history.



History by convention has come to be regarded as one based essentially on writings or at least on transmitted text, for instance *Rigveda*, *Avesta* weren't written down when they were composed but were transmitted through oral means and ultimately written down; so let us say writing but speak of textual sources.

From that time history is supposed to begin because that is the normal way in which historians study. Evidence, artifacts and so on which are our only sources for the earlier time are studied by archeologists. This is one division between prehistory and history.

Then there is the intermediate period -proto history where archeology and writing both are our sources. These are actually divisions not based on logic but based on professional limits. Where the archeologist's work is basic when it's prehistory or proto-history and where historian's work is basic is the study of textual sources. So naturally, history for different countries starts from different times, different starting points. There is no single historical time for

the world.

**Q: Sir, you mentioned about *Rigveda*, *Avesta*, and also about archeological evidences, so in a way it is expanding the scope of the core historical study, the study of the text. Does that in anyway make the subject of history vulnerable to be infiltrated by myths and ahistorical information ?**

**A:** Actually there is nothing in *Rigveda* or *Avesta* which would create myths. There is of course belief in Gods and Goddesses in *Rigveda* and belief in Gods and angels in *Avesta*. As you know Zoroastrianism is an Indo-Iranian religion because of its influence on Judaism and the through Judaism on Christianity and Islam

which is practically one of the Semitic religions. So there is no reason why these texts should introduce myths. Actually detailed myths developed later. For instance it developed in all languages, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and Greek. In some civilizations they are regarded as myths as for instance the Greeks. In some civilizations there came to be large scale belief in myths as for instance the Indian present civilization and as for Muslims who believe in stories in Quran and don't regard them as myths. *Thus the use of myth as history maybe a very late development.*

**Q: Sir, what is your view on new trends that have developed in recent times in historical writings like postmodernism, subaltern school, counter-factual history etc.?**

An: Basic fact in history is that there are two levels. One level is facts or as Carr calls it Historical facts, but the word fact is enough. You establish facts which include of course ideas and events, you establish facts by various methods which can really be called deductive and scientific up to a degree or some other call those quasi-judicial (methods) that is to say, you examine events, evidence and those sources which are primary, which are close to events in space and time. You examine the language, you establish when this was written, so there are many allied disciplines like, linguistics, archeology and numismatics and so on which helps us to establish facts. You then enter two kinds of difficulties, either the facts are few and large area are uncovered so there is room for speculation, as for ancient India, let's say Mauryan Empire, little do we know about Chandragupta, and many assumptions about Chandragupta are based on Asokan inscriptions and what Mauryan empire was like during Asoka's period. So there is a large room for speculations. Then there is another problem that the facts are so numerous that there can be large number of credible interpretations by assembling one set of facts. If we are dealing with not millions but billions of facts, then a large number of interpretations of the same facts, scientifically and objectively established, are possible and therefore there is room for interpretations.

Postmodernist, so called, questioned the validity of merely establishing facts and of studying the causes and consequences to interpret history. The word postmodern came from architecture, a dislike among the architects of modern symmetry, so history is symmetry, you cannot have a single pattern. But then of course postmodernist got divided into a large number of trends, some of them in fact established symmetries like the subaltern, for instance. Others had little to do with postmodernism like the Namierists. Most of these schools attach different weights to different facts or different kind of evidences for instance Namierists prefer private documents to public declarations, studying of personal interest to public welfare politics and visions. Subalterns argue about elites and their definition, subaltern argue that elites are those who are western educated and they don't make history, it is the more primitive communities and a kind of mystical inheritance of revolutionary ideas by them that makes history. All these arguments are contestable on the basis of facts and evidences but some so called postmodernists, when they reject the whole method of history, then of course it is very difficult to contest. For example Edward Said in orientalism seems to contest the use of scientific method by persons who are themselves not Orientals.

**Q: Sir, you said that there are two sets of problems that we come across when we deal with facts i.e. scarcity and abundance of facts, and different schools' mechanism of coping with these problems. Have these schools of thought contributed to historical studies in any sort?**

A: It is difficult to say whether they've contributed or not to historical studies. I don't agree that they have any factor which was not studied before, what subalterns have added is a mystical element for example that subaltern communities inherit a kind of revolutionary tradition, which of course is a very dubious approach.

**Q: There is one set of problem based on theories, then there is another set of problems, that we see in our country today that include revision of textbooks, distortion of history and recent popular trends of revision of history to suit political motives and its representation in popular media. How should academicians tackle these problems?**

A: This is a worldwide problem and practically found in the historiography of a number of countries. *It derives partly from a kind of reactionary nationalism wherein you want to attribute every achievement to your own country, or to your own religion, or to your own civilization. It has happened in many countries.* For instance take Muslims, they have always called their medical system *Unani* but now they want to call it

Arabic, as if by calling it Arabic they deprive the Greeks of establishing scientific system of medicine. Just using inverted commas and changing names wouldn't do anything. Similarly in our country we now claim all kinds of discoveries and are very annoyed if someone says this was discovered elsewhere, for example Pythagoras theorem was discovered in Greek civilization and not in India. These kinds of things have long existed but now because of BJP Government and because RSS has always furthered this kind of nationalist myths that I'd call pseudo-nationalists myths. They're now trying to put these myths into the text book and there is also an anti-Muslim edge to it, as they want to change the political history of the medieval period. *Of course you can't change history. Once an event has happened you can't change it but you can believe that they didn't happen.*

**Q: Since, we are talking about history and historiography and at Aligarh we have a have specific tradition of history writing, when, Sir, in your memory did Aligarh historical tradition begin and how has it grown since its inception? And how objective were the earliest historical works?**

A: I don't agree that Aligarh has a particular historical tradition. We judge the performance of any place or institution by how much it conforms to the scientific and objective approach. Our founder (Sir Syed Ahmad Khan) himself when he wrote his books on Delhi monuments in 1840s, then he was doing something which was not in the historical tradition at all, that was totally developed in Europe: Antiquities. Study of antiquities was not a part of historiography in India or in Asian countries except for China. So this came from the west. But in the same book he wrote *Tazkiras* or biographical account in second part, which were part of traditional historiography. So this work was a combination. At this time he had nothing to do with Aligarh, in fact most of his historical works are not connected with Aligarh.

But when MAO college was established it promoted a kind of anti-theological approach, I won't call it secular but anti-theological, loyalist but anti-theological approach this led to a very interesting development from 1916-1919 a large number of Amir Khusrau's works were published, which were very well edited and were provided with introductions. In case of his Hindi writings introductions were wonderful, they were written by editors who knew Sanskrit and had very good knowledge of Hindi sources. The first Professor of History (last of MAO College and first of AMU) was K.M. Panicker, a famous historian who wrote *Sri Harsha of Kannauj*. Subsequently, in 20s and 30s there were two streams one was what I would call nationalist other was developing a kind of tradition that like compilation of Amir Khusrau's work, demanded study of sources, this stream was directly based on historical sources. This was quite important because most of the writing on medieval India were based on Elliot and Dawson, which is a monumental work and all credit should be given to Elliot and Dawson, particularly Elliot for his scientific and rational approach. But many source still remained (which weren't translated) and Elliot and Dawson only had selections of translations. Now if you look at Prof. Mohd Habib's *Mahmud of Ghazni*, you'll find that it is only based on translations (Dawson's work), it is basically an interpretation based on translation. He (Prof. Mohd. Habib) knew Persian very well but he didn't go to the Persian sources for this work. It is purely a nationalist interpretation of Mahmud of Ghazni, placing him in the context of Iranian Renaissance. But then he himself turned to Persian sources, translated *Khazanin-ul-Futuh* of Amir Khusrau, encouraging all his student to read Persian sources. Unfortunately the published work that came out of Aligarh was not very good because in 30s and 40s, mainly it was about teaching, PhD research and papers, oriental conferences of history, history congress. This was a curious situation many regarded teaching as more important than writing like my own teacher Prof. Shaikh Abdur Rasheed, whose knowledge on Delhi Sultanate period was immense, he had studied almost every Persian source and was editing them.

From 1953 another element entered Aligarh, that was resources, before that resources were few. In 1953 Government of India gave a very large grant, because it was felt by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that medieval India was not adequately studied and there were many universities that had omitted medieval India and had now departments of history where only modern history was taught and a separate department for Ancient Indian history and culture. The education minister also gave a huge grant, at that time huge, looking at Government of India's own resources. These grants were used to build up library, to issue publication and conduct research program which were looked after by these grants. Then in 1968-69 Department of History at Aligarh was identified as a Centre of Advanced Study in Medieval Indian History. Theoretically grants would be no problem from then.



I think in our Centre of learning in India in 50s and 60s, a new kind of approach, the Marxist, led by Kosambi and Sharma and others developed. This approach also influenced the Agrarian System of Mughal India, which was influenced by the Marxist approach, although before writing it I had read neither Kosambi nor Sharma. Then there was also influence of rationalist historiography based on objective sources, concentration unfortunately was basically on medieval, except archaeology which Prof. Nurul Hasan and Prof. R.C. Gaur developed. As far as teaching was concerned, much attention was paid on all periods of Indian history and also world history because you can't understand Indian history without the context of Europe, if you don't know what was happening in the world. So that was essential and until very late that was follower, but now it seems to have weakened. One advantage also was that there were, for instance African students and it was particularly important to realize that Africa was also a part of the world and its history was important, unfortunately that too Aligarh has lost because of a foolish admission policy where foreigners are not encouraged to come. If we look at Published works, they are quite impressive in 70s and 80s, compared to earlier decades, but they don't conform to any particular school or one particular line of interpretation, for instance my friend Prof. Athar Ali and I, disagreed on almost everything and yet our works got published. Then there was emphasis on statistical history as well, so there was an attempt to take up modern methods of historiography, not only theories of history but also methods of historiography, with quantitative analysis playing an increasing role.

**Q. There is one last question, Sir, since we are talking about Aligarh and your last answer came up to Q. There is one last question, Sir, since we are talking about Aligarh and your last answer came up to the 80s, so what in your opinion regarding the research that is being carried out in present times and what areas should students pursue in order to be more productive in the field of history?**

A. That depends on each individual scholar's interest, I would argue that first of all knowing the language of the sources and directly going to the sources is very important. Unfortunately not only the knowledge of Persian but you would be surprised even the knowledge of Sanskrit is slimming. I don't know about present times but a few years back the epigraphy section Archaeological Survey were not only not getting people who can read Persian and Arabic inscription but not getting people who can read Puranic, Kharoshthi and Tamil Brahmi inscriptions so there is a surprising lack of specialist skills in the country. You can see, for instance (forget about Aligarh) more inscriptions were published, in better scientific fashion before 1880s, even when they are published now, the editing is bad, often the translations have errors. *Epigraphia Indica* has practically ceased publication and the Journal of the Epigraphic society all depends on one person, even then its quality is very uneven, but at least it has continued publishing Arabic and Persian inscriptions. This was an example.

First one should be learned in the sources and also then take a subject which is meaningful, that can add to knowledge. You know much of the research today that is taking place in this country is like the speeches of American Congressmen, the speaker of the House of Representatives said at one time, that they (American Congressmen) can't open their mouths without deducting from the sum total of human knowledge. *So if you write a thesis in which facts are wrong then you are actually deducting from the knowledge, so it's all a matter of substance which one should pursue, but research can't be pursued if our linguistic sources are limited or if they remain so limited.*

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*Interviewed by Lubna Irfan and Asra Alavi for the first issue of Bulletin of Sultania Historical Society (BOSHS), Jan-Jun 2017 issue.*

*Watch the interview:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zoJppZCEt8>



## A GLIMPSE OF THE FUNCTION OF SULTANIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 2017



7th June 2017 was a regular day for the rest of Aligarh Muslim University, but for the outgoing batch of M.A. of Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History it was an end of an era. The Sultania Historical Society which has been redundant for many years is only resurrected each year to keep fresh in the minds of the outgoing batches of M.A. the delicious smell of the kebabs and *Qorma* that is served as a farewell meal for the students in the function of Sultania Historical Society which is the last ritual in the teacher student relationship of the Department.

This years function must have been an experience of a lifetime for students because Prof. Irfan Habib, himself graced the occasion to deliver a talk and the also distributed various awards.

Irfan Habib, while delivering his speech as the Chief Guest in the Sultania Historical Society's function at the Department of History, commented on the nature of treatment of non-muslims at AMU, in the past. He talked about Dr. Ganda Singh, who had become a renowned scholar of history but didn't have an M.A. degree, and needed one. AMU provided this great Sikh scholar with the special provision of doing M.A. through an M.Phil. On a lighter note Prof. Habib added that during his masters days this particular act was referred to as Ganda Singh Amendment.

Following Prof. Habib's talk, Prof. S.A. Nadeem Rezavi addressed the audience and gave a detailed description of the nature and significance of the awards that were being given to students during this ceremony, namely Razmi Rizwan Memorial Award and Sohail Ahmad Memorial Award.

This was further followed by Prof. Habib handing over the prizes to their respective achievers, the Razmi Rizwan Award was won by Basharat Saleem Parray and the Sohail Ahmad Memorial Award went to Muhammad Husain Ganai. The award distribution led to an opportunity for the students to express their parting words in front of the audience and Laiba Shagufi and Basharat Saleem Parray spoke their hearts out. Muhammad Husain Ganai, as the secretary of the Sulatnia Historical Society conducted the entire program.

This program was eventually followed by an iftar and a lavish dinner, after which with much love and some tears the students parted ways.



The outgoing batch of M.A. with the Chairman



Prof. Irfan Habib addressing the audience  
in the function of Sultania Historical Society





Prof. Irfan Habib addressing the audience  
in the function of Sultania Historical Society



Prof. Ali Nadeem Rezavi highlighting the significance  
of the Razmi Rizwan Memorial Award and Sohail Ahmad Memorial Award





Mr. Mohd. Husain Ganai receiving the award for highest marks in Masters 1st year



Mr. Basharat Saleem Parray receiving the Razmi Rizwan Memorial Award





Teachers and Students, Centre of Advanced Study,  
Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University



Students with Prof. Ruqaiyya Hussain





Prof. Ishrat Alam surrounded by his students



Prof. Mohammad Sajad being clicked with his students



Basharat Saleem Parray speaking about his time at  
Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History

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It has been five years when I joined the CAS, Department of History as a student. And I must say that its a matter of great luck and privilege that I remained under the guidance of such amazing teachers and legendry personalities who worked as the pioneers of the subject. And now it feels like it is my second home.

It will be my pleasure if I would contribute to keep up the legacy of the Department.

-Basharat Saleem Parray

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Layma Parveen, expressing her feelings about her experiences at AMU

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If I look back to the journey of my two years, then I would say, blessed I am that I got admission in Centre of Advanced Study (CAS), Department of history, AMU. But earlier I used to dislike AMU for its "conservativeness" and now I regret for my previous perception.

I met such nice people here , my teachers, my classmates, my seniors and juniors and my hostel mates who were always there to help me, to guide me whenever I needed it. I am lucky that I got a chance to be enrolled in AMU as a student of CAS, Department of history.

-Layma Parveen.

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## Obituary Dr. Biswamoy Pati

-Mohd. Asif (mohdasif4494@gmail.com, GJ-5116)  
M.A. II Semester, Department of History, AMU



In the current milieu of our country where the right wing ideologue, RSS, and NDA government is attacking the education system. In such a time we lost our beloved friend, teacher and comrade Biswamoy Pati who always remained at the forefront of the struggle against such attacks, for instances he was one of the major initiator in organizing the historians against the Hindutva assault on history.

He died of a cardiac arrest during a treatment, which involved an otherwise minor surgery for removing a bleeding polyp in the colon. The void caused by his death is really impossible to be filled by anyone.

Dr. Pati was not only popular among the teaching staff of the Delhi University but had long lasting and significant influence on the minds of students due to his unique teaching style and boldness to make his stand clear on various issues. He spent close to three decades researching and teaching in Sri Venketeshwara College; South Campus of Delhi University and then moved to the politically vibrant history department of same varsity.

In the field of academia, he made his own way of perceiving history with an aim to analyse the social & cultural process propagated by political regimes. He chose his native place i.e. Odisha as the location of one of his research projects, he shed light on the issues of adivasis, gender, caste and conversion system there. He has published more than 20 books, including collaborative volumes as parts of collective projects, besides many articles in the journal & book chapters on wide range of themes of historical research. His first book; *Resisting Domination: Peasants, Tribals & the National Movement in Orrisa, 1920-1950* remains a classic. In the editorial team of journal *Social Scientist* he was an instrumental personality in editing and book reviewing. His recently published magnum opus, *South Asia from the margins: Echoes of Orissa 1800-2000* offered a detailed investigation into the problems of colonialism & its impact upon the lives of colonised.

We wish his soul rests in peace and the legacy that he began is taken forward further.